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Issue

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Volume 1, Number 1 1985

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The Ten Artists That Mattered Most, 1985-1995

Kurt: An Intimate Photo Album

Ten Images That Rocked the World

Voodoo in the American South by William T. Vollmann

The Sub Pop Story by Mike Rubin

Answered Prayers: The Fall and Rise of the Christian Right by Elizabeth Mitchell

Hip Hop's Alternative Nation by Charles Aaron

HIV-Positive Mothers and AZT: The Untold Story by Celia Farber

How MTV Changed the World by Rob Sheffield

Ronald Reagan Revisited by Marc Cooper

Michael Jordan Reappraised by Michael Eric Dyson

Heathers Rescreened by Jonathan Bernstein

Role Reversal: The New Wave of Feminist Porn by Elizabeth Gilbert

The Empty Tyranny of Political Correctness by Tom Carson

Sex, Drugs, and Other Vices by Simon Black

Rave Up: In Techno's House by Dennis Cooper

Lock Up: Prison Culture by Julia Chaplin

The Technological Revolution by Richard Gehr

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Volume 11, Number 1 April 1995

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This photograph by BP Fallon.

U2's Bono gets it to go.

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SPECIAL 10th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

TEN YEARS THAT ROCKED THE WORLD

Ronald Reagan and Kurt Cobain, PC and MTV, the fall of the Wall and the resurrection of Nelson Mandela—all this, and much more, in our special section, commemorating the past ten years.

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Once again, AZT is being heralded as a miracle drug after it was shown to reduce the rate of HIV transmission from mother to child in a controversial clinical trial. But questions are surfacing about the quality of the data and the tremendous risks to parent and infant. By Celia Farber.

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RECORDS: P.J. Harvey's *To Send You My Love*; The Pooh Sticks; Matthew Sweet; more. **MOVIES:**

The Basketball Diaries, *Kiss of Death*.

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farber/pete: 1994. A scene from an Eliaquim Soaninha. See Elizabeth Gilbert's article on feminist porn, page 150.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY M. HARRIS

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Belly KING

Pictured: (l-r) Gail, Chris, Tanya, Tom, L.e. Belly, the folks who a year ago asked you to *Food the Tree*, grapple with (and surmount) the oh-so-crucial sophomore effect, confidently titled "KING." See for yourself, on CD or Cassette or ever-lovin' Vinyl from Sire Records.

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As part of its tenth anniversary celebration, SPIN has produced a rock 'n' roll history of the past decade that will air on 300 college radio stations in early April. "Ten Years That Rocked The World" uses exclusive interviews and the best songs from the most influential artists to paint a 60-minute sound portrait of our time. And it's all brought to you by "Duckman," USA Network's over-the-top, outside-the-envelope, animated series about a laughable-but-lovable duck detective, his deliciously deadpan pig sidekick and his explosively dysfunctional family.



**TALE
SPINNERS**

Charles Aaron is a Senior Contributing Writer, a longtime contributor to the *Village Voice*, and creator of the currently defunct dread-zine, *Super Hate Jr.*

- **Senior Contributing Writer Jonethen Bernstein** also writes for *The Face*, *Interview*, and *YM*.
- **Simon Black**, author of *The Book of Frank* (Baskerville), lives in L.A. and is at work on his third novel, *Him and Her*.
- **Tom Carson** is a staff writer for the *Village Voice*.
- Contributing Editor **Dennis Cooper**'s book of selected poems, *The Dream Police* (Grove Press), is out this month.
- **SPIN Political Correspondent Marc Cooper** is author of *Roll Over Che Guevara: Travels of a Radical Reporter* (Verso).
- **Michael Eric Dyson** is Professor of Communication Studies and Director of the Institute of African-American Research at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, as well as an ordained Baptist minister and author of *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X* (Oxford University Press).
- **Chuck Eddy** is author of *Stairway to Hell: The 500 Best Heavy Metal Albums in the Universe* (Harmony) and a regular contributor to *SPIN*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *Vibe*.
- **Senior Contributing Writer Cella Farber** has been writing on AIDS and other subjects in *SPIN* for eight years.
- Contributing Editor **Richard Gehr** started writing for *SPIN* in 1985 and is currently compiling an encyclopedia of world music for Pantheon.
- **Elizabeth Gilbert** is a Senior Contributing Writer and won an honorable mention in the *Best American Short Stories of 1994* (Houghton Mifflin) for her story "Pilgrims."
- **Greg Goldin** writes regularly for *L.A. Weekly*.
- **Senior Contributing Writer Jim Greer** flails on bass for Dayton, Ohio's Guided By Voices.
- A former Managing Editor of *SPIN* and *Interview*, **Drew Hopkins** just finished work as research director on Michael Apted's upcoming film *Moving the Mountain*, about China's Tiananmen Square protest.
- **James Hunter** writes the singles column for *Vibe* and contributes to the *Village Voice* and the *New York Times Magazine*.
- **Ann Powers** is the music editor of the *Village Voice*, a frequent contributor to the *New York Times*, and coeditor of *Rock She Wrote: Women Write About Rock, Pop & Rap* (Delta).
- **Simon Reynolds** is the author of *Blissed Out* (Serpent's Tail), coauthor of the upcoming *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock'n'Roll* (Harvard University Press), and a frequent contributor to *Melody Maker*, *ArtForum*, and *Mojo*.
- **Senior Contributing Writer Mike Rubin** writes regularly for the *Village Voice* and is one of the self-described "pimps" behind *MOTORBOOTY* magazine.
- **John Ryan**'s foreign reportage has appeared in *SPIN*, the *Irish Times*, the *London Times*, and the *Observer*.
- **Greg Sendow** is the former music critic of the *L.A. Herald-Examiner* and *Entertainment Weekly* and writes regularly for *Musician*.
- **Denny Schechter** is the executive producer of the Globalvision human rights TV series *Rights & Wrongs*.
- **Rob Sheffield** writes frequently about pop music for *SPIN*, the *Village Voice*, and *Radio On*.
- Contributing Editor **Dercey Steinke** is the author of *Suicide Blonde* (Washington Square Press).
- **Terri Sutton** writes regularly for *Utne Reader*, the *L.A. Weekly*, the *Village Voice*, and the *Minneapolis City Pages*.
- Staff Writer **Willem T. Vollmann** is in the midst of writing his *Seven Dreams* book series (Viking), a fictional account of the founding and settling of North America.
- **Murray Waas** is an investigative reporter specializing in national security whose work has appeared in the *New Yorker*, the *L.A. Times*, and the *Boston Globe*.
- **Berry Walters** is the pop music critic for the *San Francisco Examiner*, a regular contributor to the *Advocate* and the *Village Voice*, and has a lecture series called *Berry Walters' Fabulous World of Queer Pop Video*.
- **Senior Contributing Writer Eric Weisbard** is editing the forthcoming *SPIN Alternative Record Guide* (Vintage).

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SONY



By Bob Guccione, Jr.



Kurt Cobain and Nirvana are remembered on page 40.

The ten years of SPIN's existence are loosely bracketed by two distantly related suicides: Ian Curtis's of Joy Division in 1980, and Kurt Cobain's in 1994. Joy Division was a dark but excellent band on the fringe of pop music, a little larger than a cult band at the time although now frozen by Curtis's death at exactly that status. Nirvana exploded from the fringe and changed the world—no band since the Beatles so radically revolutionized rock'n'roll. There have been bigger bands of course, but just as the Beatles transformed rock'n'roll from alternative pop music to the pop music, Nirvana also shifted it that many degrees around to transform what had become so largely predictable and repetitious, into something absolutely unpredictable, different and, more than fresh, renewed.

Whereas Curtis's death rendered Joy Division's potential stillborn, Cobain's strangely, eerily, has reverberated Nirvana's impact like a protracted piece of his own guitar feedback—maddening, atonal, and enraged. Cobain, hounded by the business's expectations—the very business his band single-handedly turned upside down—and his own unresolved demons, nourished by his drug addiction, collapsed under the weight and surrendered to the most extreme self-destructive impulse of all. In doing so he became that which he feared he would, and tried in that most final act to avoid: the misunderstood archangel of his generation. And he lay held in that discordant note, his soul and his meaning (of which there was so much to appreciate on their own merits) and even his music suspended in the purgatory of mythology. More than ironic, it's pathetic: Our own addiction to false gods is so desperate we are sometimes driven to rob graves and consume the dead.

Lost in all the chest-beating and garment-wrenching about Cobain's suicide was a sense of compassion for the fallen soul himself—it always is. Again, our insatiable need for myth overwhelms everything else. It's the vast belly of our mostly hollow spirituality we want to feed. One night I understood, even though I didn't give in to, the impulse to end the unrelenting pain life can sometimes suddenly be. You want nothing more than to turn that pain off. In my case, as bad as I felt, I knew the pain would eventually just exhaust me to sleep, and that's what happened.

The same rain falls on all roofs, but it drums hardest on the tin ones.

This piece is not about death, though, it's about life: superficially, the life of a magazine; more deeply and unreachably about the impossible riddle of life in general. Because writing (or reading) about ten years of a magazine is approximately as interesting as writing about ten years of changing your underwear, unless there's some higher ceiling to the journey.

The higher ceiling was not conscious at first, not that we didn't want it to have one, when we launched SPIN in March '85, it's just that we didn't have the slightest idea how to pursue one. In many ways SPIN was an accident: In its timing, perfectly catching, without realizing it, the far-out-at-sea cultural and generational wave at the beginning of its ascension, and in its fresh execution. Totally fresh. None of us knew what we were doing. All the editors were writers, with the exception of our managing editor, the saintly Gregg Weatherby, who knew what he was doing, but just wondered what he was doing with us. But the result was a totally

unself-conscious magazine, brimming with enthusiasm for the culture and, literally, no idea how implausible such naïveté was under the darkening cloud of mid-'80s cynicism. In fact, as the gods smiled on us, to them, probably pitiful caravans, it was precisely our complete inappropriateness to the prevailing zeitgeist that gave us our power and value and readership, all of which, eventually, became our conscious mission. We wrote about and for a then-disempowered generation, to which we belonged not (by now) by the citizenship of similar age, but by the universal solidarity of purpose. Our readership's culture and causes and self-defining discoveries were ours too, and so were their enemies.

We didn't do this pompously, that would have required more awareness than we had. That, and maturity, came later; by then SPIN's individuality, for better or worse, often both, was established. We had empowered ourselves by the vanity of stubbornness.

A friend of mine recently said she believed the quality of one's life was relative to how one accepted death, and that this was one of the central tenets of all religions, reconciling people with mortality. In an interview for our last anniversary issue, the Dalai Lama told me the meaning of life was happiness, which for Buddhists includes being at peace with the reality of dying.

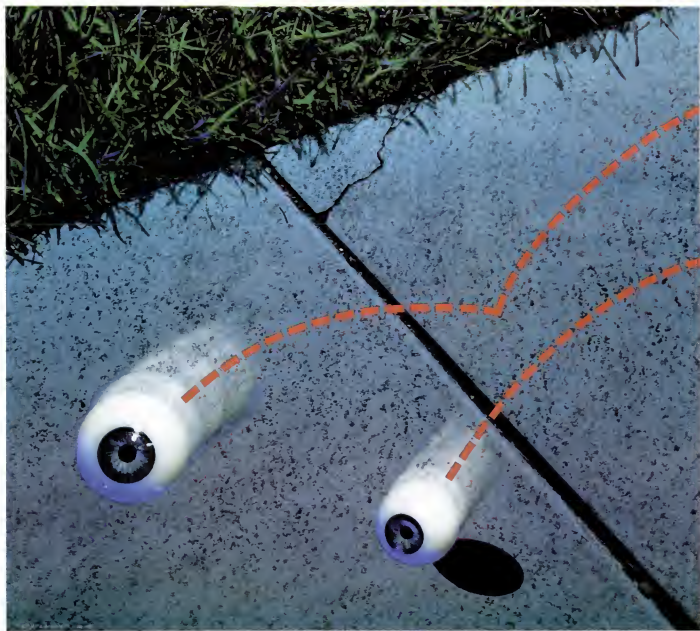
Additionally, I think, that it's in those few truly lucid moments of accepting death's inevitability that we see and appreciate the possibilities of life. We crystallize the pursuit of our purpose. For me, for ten full, often hair-raising, never boring years, it's been this magazine. I've been very, very lucky. Why, is a mystery. ●



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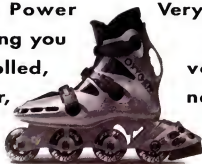
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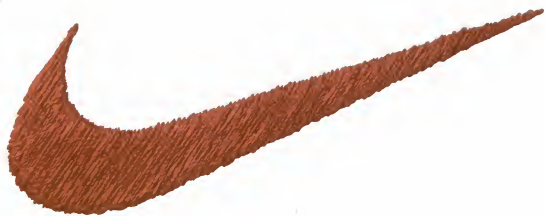
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Russia decided to lay down their arms, we both still are playing with the proverbial nuclear aces up our sleeves. Two, we will never rid this world of weapons of mass destruction.

V'Al Foro
valley@engin.umich.edu

How sweet that Dr. Sam Cohen received a medal from the Pope for inventing a weapon that could kill living things and leave buildings intact! How did this wonderful event escape the attention of the Nobel Peace Prize committee? Now if he could just invent a weapon that could effectively kill every living thing on the planet without disturbing the infrastructure, maybe God himself would step down and pin a medal on Cohen's dead, rotting corpse.

Rick Sims
rjsims@aol.com

I began to read "The Ultimate Terrorist Weapon" in the hopes of acquiring some information about red mercury. By the time I got to the end, however, every word was colored by the paranoid impression given of Dr. Sam Cohen. This had very little to do with his writing, and a whole lot to do with the highly unflattering full-page photograph of Cohen. This picture's comedic value was only outweighed by the extent to which it neutered the effectiveness of the article as a whole.

ASRAHAM LEVITAN
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

AND NOW A FEW WORDS FROM OUR SICK AND ANGRY READERS

We are sick. Your Readers Poll [January '95] proves it.

ZACK STURGEON
sturg1@aol.com

There are at least three of us in Oakland, California, who are ashamed to call ourselves SPIN readers after the results of your latest Readers Poll. We were unaware that so many racist, ignorant fucks still existed on the planet. Having "nobody" in second place for Best Rapper and celebrating the suicide of Kurt Cobain further confirms the low level of intelligence and sophomoric humor of your (other) readers; it's a wonder they even knew how to read enough to answer the questions.

MICHELE BACK, CONSTANCE FALK,
AND ANDREW LAW
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

It disturbs me to think that my generation cannot recognize talent and in its place prefers someone who would have never been popular if her media-made god of a husband hadn't taken his life. Obviously Kurt couldn't handle Courtney, so why should we have to?

ANNA C. RUSSELL
ROME, GEORGIA

Living in a world in which Kurt's suicide can be voted the fourth best thing to happen in the last year is exactly what made him pull the trigger.

KATHRYN BRUNER
SOUTH LYON, MICHIGAN

Where do these people get off saying that someone killing themselves is good?

CRAIG ZAZELLA
JONESBORO, GEORGIA

SPIN readers have to be the sorriest group of people in history—and don't even try to pull that crap about how I'm a SPIN reader, too. I stole this magazine from my brother. This isn't Generation X. It's Generation I'll Do Anything Just Don't Call Me Mainstream. As usual, in your quest to become unique, you have all turned out the same.

JOHN MCCORMACK
SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA

NEXT YEAR AT LOLLAPALOOZA

Please tell me that shit about Ace of Base, All-4-One, Warrant, and Jethro Tull being at Lollapalooza was just some kind of sick joke! ["Readers Poll: Between the Lines," January '95]. I've always loved going to Lollapalooza and with rumors of Nine Inch Nails headlining, I couldn't be more excited. But Ace of Base being there has me really frightened. Please say it's some kind of twisted joke!

STEPHANIE ASBOMATIS
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

It's some kind of twisted joke. —Ed.

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How refreshingly distinctive.

"The hint of angelica root in Tanqueray made Mr. Jenkins mischievous. Perhaps he shouldn't have replaced the models' mineral water with Tanqueray & Tonic."



THE CORPORATE WAVE:

1994 EXPERIMENTAL JET SET, TRASH AND NO STAR

sonic youth took their jets with an eyes-closed vision of experience and desire, a vision to the all-time beyond the crunch, and a bliss for a feather to the breath. Features the adult smash "Roll In The Rain".



1992 DIRTY

through meditations on a child's concern, the emotional complexity of the "neurotic friend", loss and faith and the sense of the positive, explored in rhyme. Features "SONG," "Tenth Against Tenness," "Sugar Kane" and the upcoming "Theresa's Grand-Marriage" cover art by Mike Kelley.



1990 GOO

conceived and realized in the transition from self-management to their own belated, \$88 for songwriters, taking off in any direction available, one of major-labeling's wildest concepts. Features "Displacement" and the classic "Real Thing" cover art by Raymond Pettibone.



THE UNDERGROUND YEARS:

1988 DAYDREAM NATION

a celebration of the sprawling wilderness that is musical America and beyond, an intimate, as if by accident, the feeling of mystery, this one made them famous whether they liked it or not, named best rock band by New Musical Express and Rolling Stone, pulled in the Village Voice and Rolling Stone, this was the first of 11 to be released and secured the indie-punker hit "Pussy Age Night," also features "Silver Rocket" and "Candle" cover art by Richard Hamner. liner notes by John Zorn.



THE WHITIE ALBUM

recreated pseudonymously as Gleece Youth as 19/Concept co-designed with Mike Watt (Klimax, 2001) (1990) as a hardcore/beatbox experiment with David West (guitar, bass) and Zorn. Features "Two Cool Rock Kids Listening To Sex," "Machete," "Addicted To Love" and massive euro-dance hit "Into The Scream(s)!" liner notes by Mike Watt.



1987 SISTER

imagery tapping in from the philosophical minds of P.E. Dick, Ron F. and Black Flag culminates with all that in sonic pop and pop, recorded and mixed on vintage equipment, this side sealed Sonic Youth's rate as neo-noirists of the important art. Features "Beauty Like In The Eye" and the magic road that is "Cotton Candy." liner notes by Dennis Cooper.



1986 EVOL

this is the record on which Steve Shelley takes over for drummer Rob Bert. rotting teenager barefoot-in-the-bath-pyrexia. Long leg as post-wave superstar. Features "Shadow of a Doubt" and the infamous cup-burst "Expressway To Tr Skull." cover photo by R. Kern. liner notes by Lisa Carver.



1985 BAD MOON RISING

broad strokes of neo-sound and elegiac notes, this recording begins the trans-galactic sonic life(cycle), as if one theory collected music. Features "Death Valley '85" with love's tempestuous Lydia Lunch-the first R17, cover photo by James Welling. liner notes by Gerard Conley.



1983 CONFUSION IS SEX

out of the gallery and into the mesh pit, she started out as a cheapo single idea turned into the first full length killer, way away from the garage band of the day, this is opened down still and forever unaltered and blown. Further feature is unraveled by the inclusion of the super-wave KILL TR DUBS up. Features the timeless "In the Pines" cover art by K. G. liner notes by David Marrett.



SONIC YOUTH SONIC YOUTH SONIC YOUTH

POP/ART MYTH & MUSIC

SONIC YOUTH reared its fitful head amongst an anarchy of cultural wildness in the nascent days of U.S. 80's hardcore americana. Trained as soldiers of the abstract and potter's elite they traversed and rang tales with common themes both radical and plain. Was feedback a song?? Was feminism blasted?? "Experiments shan't end..." quoth metallurgists/alchemists et al --and so, thus, Sonic Youth become the contemporary. Somewhere in flight. Exploring, befriending and forever upending. The apprenticeship continues.....

SCATTERED FUTURE:

we will be releasing Sonic Youth's 1st spontaneously titled mini-ep from 1981 of year's and which will include bonus cassette and generous liner notes by neo-frontiersman Byron Coley, also at some point in the LP release of SONIC DEATH, a 1983 cassette of collaged liveance and the critically acceoted "MARTIN-DIE" LP.



BE SURE TO CATCH SONIC YOUTH TOURING WITH REM in May

To coincide with this tour we are releasing a CD titled SCREAMING FIELDS OF SONIC LOVE (the title and artwork taken from an early 80s cover sticker the band had made) which includes tracks from all the above re-releases.



And for the visually adventurous we are releasing a SCREAMING FIELDS OF SONIC LOVE video-pak which features all the videos and TV shots Sonic Youth had made pre-DOO/Geiger.

just ask yr local grocer.

Somewhere in flight. Exploring, befriending and forever upending. The Sonic Youth can club. Sonic Death/pe box 1999/Arborea, a.j. 07030 was



10 YEARS that ROCKED the WORLD

Have you ever known someone who, just a few hours into a four-day road trip, turns down the radio to ask, "So, are we having fun yet?" An anniversary issue of a magazine poses the same question. Our unit of measurement, the ten years from 1985 to 1995, is admittedly artificial, even presumptuous; after all, who are we to bracket history? Yet the need to contain time, to mark its passage, drives all sorts of commemorations, from year-end roundups, to crass centennial celebrations, to the hoopla surrounding the upcoming millenium. We can't seem to tell where we are or where we're going unless we know where we've been.

So where *have* we been? As befits its tradition, rock'n'roll provided sustenance and meaning to a generation badly in need. It may not always succeed (see Kurt Cobain), but nothing else tries so unabashedly, so awkwardly, so committedly. In the "10 Artists That Matter Most," we celebrate those who have always tried, often failed, and never stood still.

Politically, the nation's march toward conservatism resembles a drill sergeant's instructions: right-left-right. Technologically, our cries of "Faster! Faster!" have been answered, but where are we headed, and what's the big hurry, anyway? In slower news, Communism did (the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe) and didn't (China) fail, and racism was (South Africa) and wasn't (Los Angeles) defeated. Inside, an illustrious assortment of cultural critics, political reporters, and graphic artists assess the key figures, trends, and ideologies of the past ten years, while "10 Images That Rocked the World" offers a pictorial scrapbook of the decade's most unforgettable events. And on the flip side, SPIN unearths the whereabouts of some one-hit wonders you probably haven't been wondering about.

Our advice: Think of the upcoming pages as a car ride without any particular destination. No, we're not there yet; and yes, we've had a lot of fun on the way.



Nirvana, from left:
Krist Novoselic,
Kurt Cobain, and
Dave Grohl.

THE TEN THAT MATTER MOST '85-'95

What does it take to be named one of the top ten artists of the decade? Innovation, influence, imagination, integrity. It all adds up to genius, and the following honorees have it in spades.

1 Nirvana

In 1990, a Sub Pop single called "Silver"/"Dive" circulated by word of mouth among record collectors, college DJs, and suchlike; I could never remember which title referred to the little gem I thought of as "Grandma Take Me Home." But it's "Dive," the flip, that ironically seems far more prophetic now. Recorded during the band's first session with producer Butch Vig (who'd go on to helm you-know-what), it's got one of those lumbering lumberjack riffs Nirvana executed with a singer-songwriter's hookiness, peaking, as always, at the chorus: "Dive, dive, dive in me." Did Kurt Cobain already know we all would?

By any reasonable comparison to what followed, "Silver" is a two-minute nonentity. Krist Novoselic's curling bass line parts for some tightly drawn lyrics. "Mom and Dad went to a show / They dropped me off at Grandpa Joe's / I kicked and screamed / Said please don't go / Grandma take me home / Grandma take me home / Grandma take me home / Grandma take me home / Grandma take me home / Grandma take me home / Grandma take me home." Dinner isn't very good. The singer's told to stop crying over his meat and go ride his bike. Then he eats ice cream for dessert (the lyrics don't exactly track), falls asleep, watches TV, and wakes up in his mother's arms. Still screaming Grandma take me home.

I can't help wishing "Silver" had been the blueprint for the Nirvana that emerged in 1991. Not the supergroup with a lead singer given to idolizing the Vaselines and the Raincoats, but a smaller "international pop underground" trio like the Vaselines and the Raincoats. Shamefully off-kilter. Incredibly rocking anyhow, but only for those dog-eared enough (in the sales sense) to register its pitch.

You can hear traces of this Nirvana in *Nevermind*'s "On a Plain" (resurrected even more clearly in the *Unplugged* version), in *In Utero*'s "Dumb" ("My heart is broke / But I have some glue / Help me inhale / And mend it with you... / Then we'll come down / And have a hangover"). The aesthete in me may prefer this Nirvana to any other, but that's irrelevant. Like it or not, Cobain had more important work to do.

Every time Novoselic's bass, Dave Grohl's drums, and Cobain's guitar crunch into each other on *Nevermind*, their chiming chords ring as though the world were a town with one church bell. Complaining purists are indie-minded granola heads—Vig's bold production, which assumed a social dominance that alternative rock hadn't yet achieved, may be the album's most revolutionary quality. "A denial," rasps Cobain at the end of you-know-what. But that's only half of it. Nirvana could translate underground affinities into mass music because Cobain's fragmented personality bridged the gap—inhabiting the psychopaths of "Lithium" and "Polly" but just as deeply linked to their female targets, singing with the battlefield command of a rocker and the reserve of a proud subculturalist, viscerally judgmental without a shred of elitism.

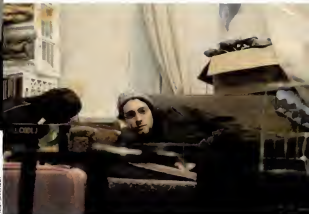
Now metaphors are all we have. What if we hadn't dived in Nirvana but waded in gradually, getting our toes wet first? Watched the band grow slyer by slyer, instead of being left trading memories like splinters off the original cross? My only answer is this: The pop Cobain loved—call it indie punk, retro classic rock, it was all still pop to him, a balm—would then have remained sub pop, as private a pleasure as "Silver." And for better or worse, that will never be enough.

ERIC WEISBARD



A Fan's Notes

Nirvana's brief but brilliant body of work inspired fevered devotion not just in its fans, but in its peers. Here fellow musicians pay tribute to a classic and revolutionary rock'n'roll band.



Lou Barlow, Sebadoh

"*Nevermind* was the soundtrack for a period of emotional upheaval in my life and the lives of all my closest friends. I've never seen anything happen like this in my life. Another of my favorite Nirvana moments: Kurt telling Krist to shut up on the MTV *Unplugged* special."

Mark Lanegan, Screaming Trees

"In the spring of '89, Nirvana played a show at the community center in my hometown of Ellensburg, Washington. They completely blew me away; it was like seeing the Who in their prime. After two songs some jerk who worked there stopped the show—they'd gone over their time limit because the ten local bands who opened had gone over time. So they just stood there for a second and then Krist started throwing his bass in the air, up to the top of this 20-foot ceiling, and catching it with one hand. Meanwhile Kurt was letting his amp go loud as hell, and their road manager got in a fistfight with the jerk guy. The whole thing was completely crazed. And this was in Ellensburg, of all places. I still believe to this day that it's the best fucking band I've ever seen. And I miss the guy more than I could ever express."

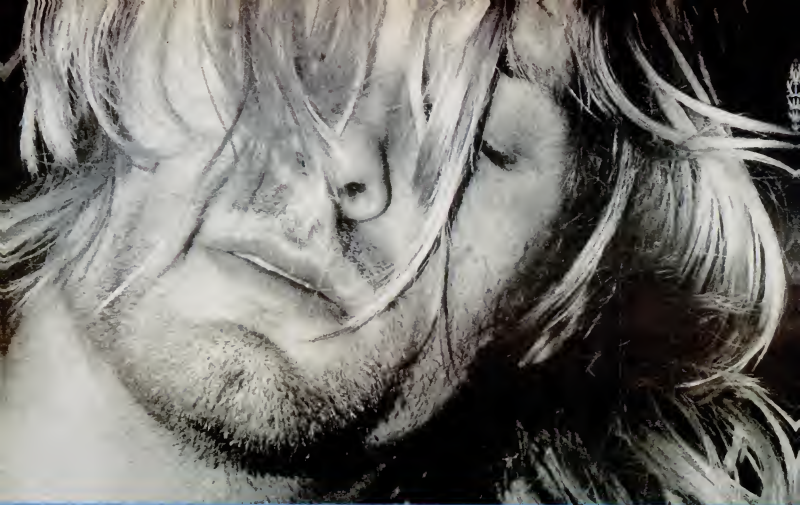
Steve Turner, Mudhoney

"We played this tiny club in San José in early '89. I don't know if it was really even a club—it was so small we had to play in the window. Nirvana opened for us and during one of the songs they were hopping around, and Kurt somehow ended up balancing on his head—still playing guitar—and stayed there for a good long time. It was one of the coolest things I'd ever seen. I tried it after that. It didn't work as well."



Above left: Nirvana, spring '89; above, Cobain, 1988, in the Olympia, Washington, apartment he shared with girlfriend Tracy Marander; left: Mark Lanegan (left) with Cobain and Dylan Carlson (top) all dolled up. Opposite page: Kurt at 15.





*Geffen Records publicity shoot, 1991; above,
Cobain in Cork, Ireland, August 1991.*



Above: Cobain and Courtney Love, April '92; right, Cobain seeking the therapeutic benefits of William S. Burroughs's Orgone Box, Lawrence, Kansas, in October 1993; below, Nirvana, '91.

Iggy Pop

"I went to see Nirvana at a small club called the Pyramid on Avenue A in New York City. It was hard to hear the guitar, but the guy playing and singing had a vibe; he hopped around like a muppet or an elf or something, hunched over his guitar, hop hop hop, hippity hippity hop. I loved that. When he sang, he put his voice in this really grating place, and it was kind of devilish sounding. At the end of the set he attacked the drum kit and threw cymbals, other bits, and finally himself into the audience. Later I saw the same guy passing the bar. He was little, with stringy blond hair and a Stoooges T-shirt. I felt proud."

Tori Amos

"I was playing a festival in Germany a few years ago right after I had done the 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' cover. This is one of those festivals where people drink gallons of German beer for three days straight. I played on the second day and they were already gone. Many boys proceeded to yell, 'Schnell, you fucking slut' as I was playing my piano. I turned to them and said, 'Look, you motherfuckers, synchronize your watches because I'm here until the big hand gets on the 12. So unless you blow me off the stage with a rifle, suffer.' And I did the longest version of 'Teen Spirit' anyone's ever done, like 22 minutes, and walked off the stage, pride intact, graciously ass-saved."

Derrick Bostrom, Meat Puppets

"We did a week with Nirvana in the fall of 1993. About halfway through our Halloween show, an overexcited fan bopped Kurt on the noggin with a tennis shoe. Kurt grabbed the offending article and looked into the



audience for the culprit. Unable to find him, Kurt dropped the shoe onto the stage, unzipped his fly, and mid-song, filled the shoe with piss."

Kim Thayil, Soundgarden

"Nirvana's success drew attention to a marketing demographic previously ignored by the mainstream, and inadvertently started a gold rush with advertising executives, product manufacturers, merchandise distributors, fashion coordinators, and rock imitators, the latter of whom have yet to equal the sincerity, power, and wit of Nirvana."

Joey Ramone, Ramones

"It's 1995 and I still haven't found total nirvana...but hope to! Speaking of Nirvana, I miss their soothing, calming effect, their soul and spirit and angst, great songs, antics, and excitement. Where are the exorcists when you need them to calm the beast within?"

Eugene Kelly, the Vaselines/Eugenius

"My favorite Nirvana memory is when we reformed the Vaselines for one night to support Nirvana when they played in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1990. Also, being asked onstage at the 1991 Reading Festival to sing 'Molly's Lips.' Unforgettable!"

Lee Ranaldo, Sonic Youth

"Our bands were playing the Reading Festival in 1991, just before *Nevermind* went ballistic. Toward the end of an absolutely raging set, Kurt leapt over the monitors and into the photo pit where Dave Markey just happened to be shooting our tour film, *The Year Punk Broke*. Hundreds of arms reached out to grab him. Kurt, still playing, made his way over to Markey, stuck his mouth to the camera mike, and said, 'This is a blues scale in E,' poking fun at himself and every guitar hero ever."

Patty Schemel, Hole

"I went to an all-ages show in Tacoma at the Community World Theater in 1987. One band had a singer with long hair and a drummer with short hair and a moustache. They played Creedence Clearwater Revival songs. I didn't think much of it. Months later, I went to see Nirvana at the Vogue in Seattle. I thought I recognized the long-haired singer on stage. 'Oh,' it occurred to me, 'these are the guys that do the Creedence covers.'"





Cobain with daughter Frances Bean.



David Bowie

"I was simply blown away when I found out that Kurt Cobain liked my work, and I always wanted to talk to him about his reasons for covering 'Man Who Sold the World.' It was a good straightforward rendition and sounded somehow very honest. It would have been nice to have worked with him, but just talking would have been real cool."

Dale Crover, Melvins

"My favorite memory of Nirvana was watching an audience of dumbfounded Canadians getting their asses kicked while Nirvana played their best song, 'Endless Nameless,' for the first time."

Blackie Onassis, Urge Overkill

"We were doing a show at the Mississippi Nights club in St. Louis on the *Nevermind* tour, and the whole day there had been this running joke in the Nirvana camp about how Guns N' Roses had just had that big riot there. Kurt mentioned that he'd like to start a riot, too, but I don't think anyone took him seriously."

"Nirvana needed to use our gear that night because the previous evening they had just trashed everything. It was only 20 minutes into their set and Dave runs in and says that Kurt just invited the entire club onstage because there were so many kids stage-diving. We realized our gear was up there, so we all went running on stage to save our equipment. We found Krist and Kurt sitting on the edge of the stage, totally bewildered, with 500 kids swarming all around them. The whole place was going crazy, the owners were calling the cops. The police showed up and Krist gave this long speech about how everyone needed to get along and he talked everyone back into their seats and the cops agreed not to arrest anybody. Nirvana started playing again and they kept the club open late so they could finish their set. Even the cops stayed and watched the show. What started out as total mayhem ended in peaceful resolution. That's how badly people wanted to hear Nirvana."

Steven Tyler, Aerosmith

"Kurt's wounds were so deep that when the music floated to the surface after being filtered through his soul, it was incorporeal."

Mac McCaughan, Superchunk

"The first time I saw Nirvana, I thought they sucked. It was at Lame Fest in Seattle, opening for Tad and Mudhoney the day *Bleach* came out. I thought the trashing of gear was contrived, and that *Bleach* was sort of low-rent Melvins. The next time I saw them was around the time the 'Silver' single came out. It took the first 30 seconds of 'School' to make me realize I had severely misjudged the power of this band; the crowd was going completely nuts. Much of the set was stuff that would be on *Nevermind*, so the songs were amazing, the energy manic, and the trashing of gear seemed inevitable, not contrived."

David Yow, The Jesus Lizard

"I play Scrabble as often as possible, as does our European tour manager. We're both pretty good and serious about the game. During a visit to Chicago, said tour manager was having his ass thrashed by me six games out of seven. He was winning the seventh game, when I took the last of the tiles from the bag and set them on my rack. Without even arranging them, they spelled the word N-I-R-R-V-A-N-A. I put the word on a triple-word score with the N completing Z-O-O-N (zoon is the whole product of a fertilized egg), giving me 97 points for the word and winning the game."

Eric Erlandson, Hole

"May or June 1991, Jabberjaw, Low Angeles. A spur-of-the-moment show during the making of *Nevermind*. About 400 lucky souls crammed into this dingy, dinky art space to sweat and stink as one. Every rock voyeur and band geek in town was there to hear, for the first time, the songs that would be *Nevermind*. The show was a mess, but, as always, Nirvana's wild yet child-sweet spirit filled the room. I remember somehow deciphering parts of 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' and 'Lithium' out of the noise and confusion and feeling overwhelmed. Nirvana were beautiful like no other." ●

2 Madonna

What we usually leave out when we talk about Madonna is what she does best: music. Since Madonna herself has done more to upstage her greatest talent than any other pop star, except, of course, Michael Jackson, separating her music from her persona has always been nearly impossible. As far back as 1985, the year Madonna became a household name, many

listeners could not hear the spoofing joy of "Material Girl" because they were distracted by an already threatening image of Madonna as a gold digger, a misconception she has never been able to escape.

Madonna emerged during a crossover era, when punks discovered synthesizers, black singers rocked out, and nearly everyone agreed that Michael Jackson, Bruce Springsteen, Cyndi Lauper, Prince, Culture Club, ZZ Top, and Tina Turner were cool, because everyone met in the middle.

Today there's no halfway point between grunge and gangsta, the new punk rock and the new jack swing. But back in the day, Madonna struck multiplatinum by overlaying fierce but largely anonymous post-disco New York club music with irony-rich, new wave personality pop. She emphasized the former on her fluffy but funky first album, and the latter on *Like a Virgin*, a gimmicky attention-grabber rooted in producer Nile Rodgers's Chic groove. Madonna's subsequent career has similarly been defined by how the singer navigates the distance between cult disco and pop, darkness and light, adventure and security. Even when her public profile slipped in the aftermath of *Erotica*, her most club-conscious and arguably best album, she was able to bounce back with elegiac, memory-laden movie ballads. *Bedtime Stories*, her latest, radiates the melancholy aura of an interior film score.

Madonna has collaborated with over two dozen songwriters and producers, yet she remains the most consistent pop star to emerge from the mid-'80s. Much of this comes down to her excellent musical taste. Like David Bowie, she's an inspired trend-spotter and translator, able to isolate the best of what's happening in the dance underground, interpret it for a mass audience, and put a videogenic face on it.

Again like Bowie, Madonna is usually at her best when drawing from a radical urban gay subculture that still has few allies in the mainstream. The queerness and blackness she embraces and the womanhood she embodies puts a twist on the banality of mass popularity and makes it political. She's fucked up a few times (most of her movies, the superficial *Sex* book, her infamous *Letterman* appearance), but even her failures are more fascinating than some of her peers' successes.

Her consistency suggests something few have noticed about Madonna: She's a great songwriter. No matter who helped write them, all her hits have that unforgettable Madonna-stamped hook that pleads, "Notice me. Remember me. Love me." Madonna may embrace ambiguity, but she's never vague with a melody. She may use the spoken word to reveal her vulnerability, but she always asserts the strength of her soul and the depth of her need with the power of her choruses. "Open your heart / I'll make you love me" could well be the message of all her songs.

BARRY WALTERS



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Public Enemy: Chuck D (far left), Flavor Flav (front), and Terminator X (far right).

3 Public Enemy

Shempy house party, Brooklyn, U.S.A., summer of 1988. A mixed and mixed-up crowd crams into a refurbished carriage house located a gunshot away from a high-rise housing project (ah, the irony). Outside, the local crack trade scurries past uninvited. Inside, we crank Run-D.M.C.'s "King of Rock" and bang our heads as we need. But afterward, a sloshed longhair in search of a beer and a clue corners me in the kitchen and asks, "Don't you guys have any rock'n'roll?" Sweaty and sputtering, I can't muster a properly sarcastic reply. But later it hits me. "What, you mean like Public Enemy?"

For a late '80s New York minute, hip hop was rock'n'roll. And then some. While Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" pushed social conscience to the edge of a Bronx rooftop in the early '80s, and

Run-D.M.C. took hard-rock style wars from the ghetto to the Queens suburbs and back again in the mid-'80s, Public Enemy demanded the world. PE dared to redirect the priorities of not only hip hop and rock, but also of popular culture. Fired by the preacherly call-ups and martyrdoms of lead rapper Carlton "Chuck D" Ridenhour and the wacked-out wisdom of trickster sidekick William "Flavor Flav" Drayton, the group posed as cultural radicals as much as pop stars.

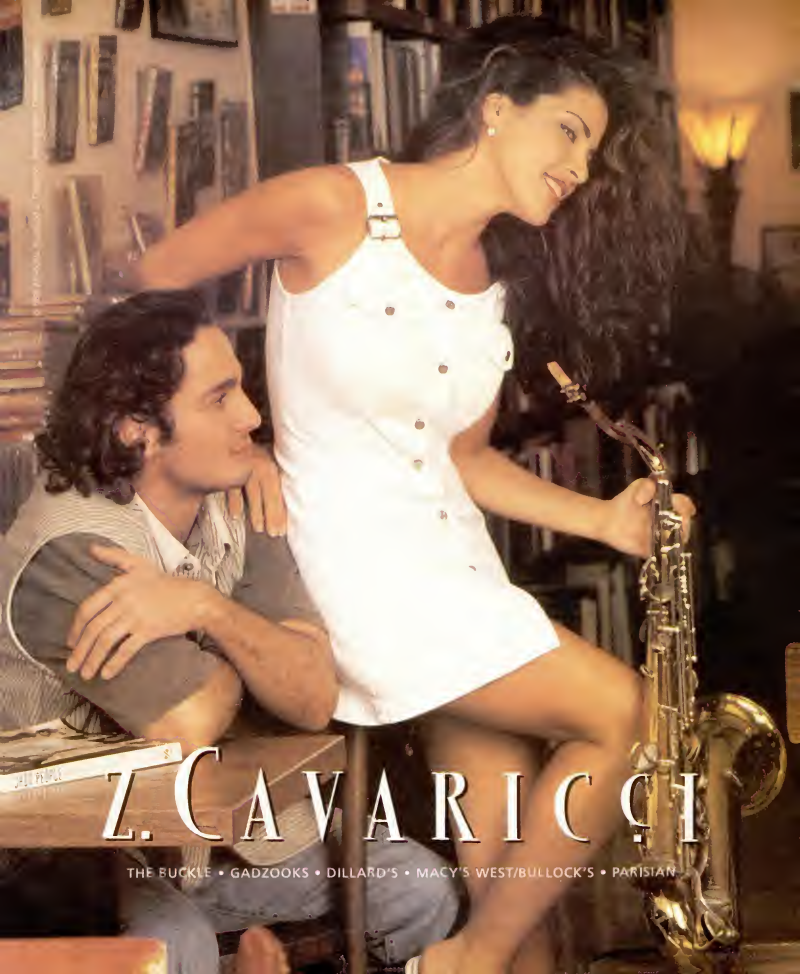
A posse of Long Island college students more seasoned and self-aware than their peers, PE explicitly suggested that hip hop's identity politics had revolutionary potency. Rejecting getting-paid-and-laid boasts, Public Enemy somehow convinced a generation of teenagers that it was cool and tough to study the racist contradictions of a capitalist society (of course, it helped if you were a straight man suspicious of Jewish economic power, but that's another bag of bean pies). Some tagged them as the hip-hop Clash, savvy recyclers of punk media gimmicks with a Black Nationalist spin. But the group was too innovative, their ambitions too complex, for such a reduction. Chuck D's logo—a B-boy in a rifle sight—was stylishly defiant, but it also acknowledged pop culture's defenseless stance in the face of institutionalized power.

Ironically, Public Enemy's most lasting

Influence may be musical. The blustery, sampled orchestrations of the Bomb Squad—Hank Shocklee, Bill Stephney, Eric "Vietnam" Sadler, and Keith Shocklee—gave hip hop a densely uneasy, funked-up edge that envisioned Miles Davis, Marvin Gaye, Curtis Mayfield, and George Clinton locked in a two-man cell. The sculpted noise of PE's albums rivaled the profound vision of Phil Spector or Motown's Holland-Dozier-Holland. The twisted siren's wail on the 1987 B-side "Rebel Without a Pause" was an angry ambitious manifesto, with or without lyrics. Add Chuck D's poetic bellow, naming names and coining phrases like an agitated adman, and you have a pop masterpiece.

In the '90s, with rap ruled by "niggaz" who don't give a fuck, it's hard to imagine a time when hip hop and rock'n'roll were defined by black college men who gave a fuck about everything, from critics to white supremacy to malt liquor. So much seemed at stake—politically, racially, and socially—that when you danced to a song like "Fight the Power," from the soundtrack to Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, you felt deeply implicated in a cause so deeply flawed that your knees nearly locked up. Throwing a party in a paradox, Public Enemy actually made you Jones for that feeling. And want to understand it.

CHARLES AARON



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4 R.E.M.

Green Day and the Offspring's great punk rock swindle of 1994 had fanzine editors across the country sweating blood, trying to distinguish "authentic" alternative from alternative marketing. "Real indie bands won't screw you!" they cried. On the cover of its anti-major label issue, *Maximum RockNRoll* ran a picture of a guy with a gun in his mouth. "Some of your friends are already this fucked!" the headline quipped. Yeah, and some of your friends too, buddy. Endlessly circling the country in smelly, claustrophobic vans, engaging in the usual puerile locker-room babble that passes for conversation in an attempt to stave off crippling boredom in the long hours before they get to the shitty club and play for 13 losers they have to schmooze in hope of finding a place to sleep—all because they don't make any money off their shitty record sales and can't stay at home. Indie labels kill bands, too.

What does all this have to do with R.E.M.? Just this: Through its 13-year major-label career, R.E.M. has been committed to doing business as unusual—not by the indie rules of escoticism, but through aesthetic confusion. There are more, and possibly more far-reaching, ways to say "no" to the corporate marketing of youth rebellion than a regimen of elitist austerities. Who's more subversive: Green Day back on Lookout! playing the punk-by-numbers to a comparatively small group of happy moshers, or R.E.M. getting a video of beautifully posed men's bodies and

awkward, mournful rage played on national TV?

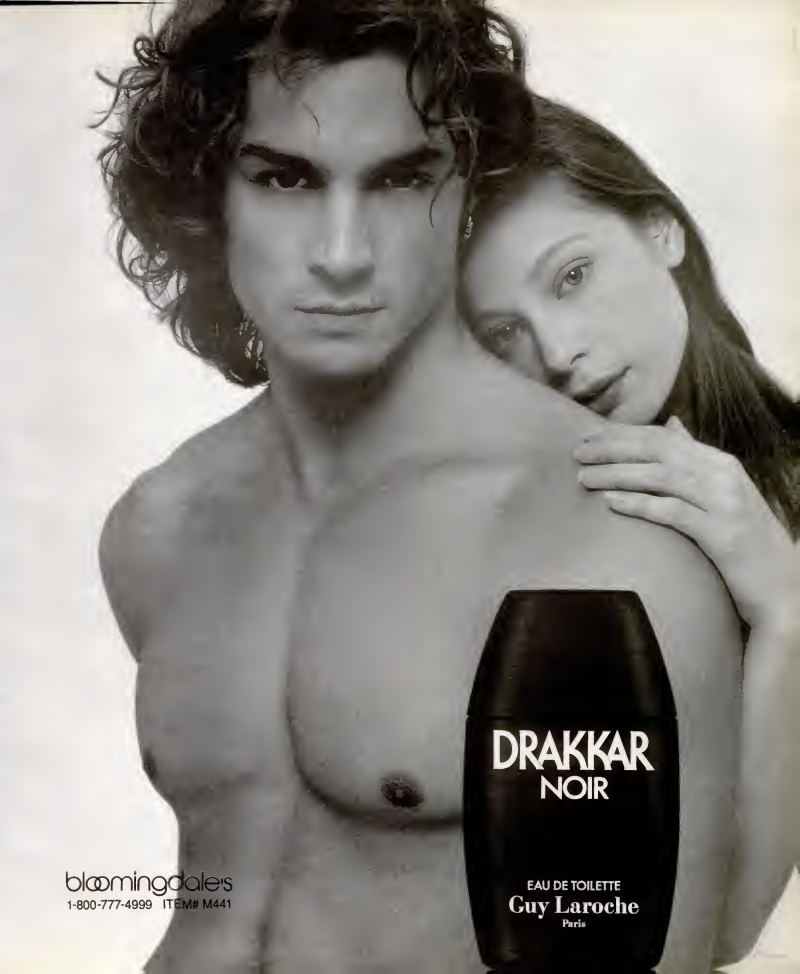
R.E.M. has always shown an uncanny understanding of the power of mass culture and the ways a band can fuck with its perpetually numbing flow. Peter Buck filled his early magazine interviews with details about Hüsker Dü and the Replacements, deflecting the focus from a single group to a movement. Michael Stipe sang almost wordlessly, like a purring cello, disrupting the expectations of linear narrative. At a time when alternative meant volume and speed, R.E.M. dared to sound sensual, lush, feminine. But with repetition and success, the band's emotional sensitivity began to seem like a device. Stipe became a pop star, an object of desire. R.E.M. tried more forceful lyrics, sharper noise, and still the machinery of popular culture spat it out as idol, product, pawn in a ghoulish game of co-optation.

Watching Kurt Cobain and Eddie Vedder struggle (with their crosses) up this same hill, I wondered why they bothered reinventing the wheel. After *Green*, R.E.M. stopped touring. The band let two years go by without releasing a record. Stipe refused to talk to those corporate magazines. Buck, Stipe, Bill Berry, and Mike Mills took back their lives. Eventually, they realized they must also take back control of their stardom, and turn the power it granted back on itself. Through inventive, seditious videos, and the contradictory meaks and juxtapositions of its '90s albums, R.E.M. forced music to again speak for them. The band taught people to see through the pop machinery, to think rather than believe, to enjoy the wit of Stipe's whip-smart hips without losing their minds to them, and to have fun doing so. Which is a damn sight better as a model than a bunch of punk-rock martyrs, wearing popularity (or its possibility) like a hair shirt and whipping themselves in the marketplace to prove their innocence. Time to lose your religion, people.

TERRI BUTTON

R.E.M., from left: Bill Berry, Mike Mills, Peter Buck, and Michael Stipe.





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5 Prince



It may be tempting these days to feel sorry for Squiggly (or Zoso, or TAFKA—The Artist Formerly Known As...wow, that's nearly Kafka—or whatever you now call His Wetness). After 16 albums, he's no longer considered the future of rock-meets-soul. It's hard to hear his influence on Beck or Boyz II Men or any of today's chart-toppers. His own albums do just okay. His movie career is kaput. He wrestled with hip hop and lost. He dated Kim Basinger and lost. And he can't even claim the title of Most Eccentric Superstar until Michael Jackson gets himself to a monastery.

But for all you fans of Nine Inch Nails and Crystal Waters, Tori Amos and techno, Prince has changed your life, whether you realize it or not. The most accomplished auteur of the postpunk era, he's pioneered the studio wizardry that has since borne fruit in all kinds of dance music from ambient to industrial, and His Meuviness continues to build a vision of art and life that is central to these multicultural times. Right now, with so much concern about realness in indie, dance, and hip-hop circles, Prince's mix-it-up pop methods isolate him. But when he boldly blended hard rock, funk, punk, pop, end soul to create that patented millennial party sound back in the early

from Little Richard to Jagger and Bowie to Patti Smith within one glorious orgy of gender confusion. And in the '90s, in songs from "Insatiable" to "Sexy M.F." and 1994's "Letitgo," not to mention the entirety of the *Black Album*, the Purple One continues to innovate sexual expression, showing men how to swing that thing without always dominating, and praising women for jumping into the erotic driver's seat.

It's likely that nobody will ever love him as much as those lucky college kids who danced all night to 1982's 1999 or made out all night to 1984's *Purple Rain*. But your Prince epiphany could have easily happened in 1987, when he released his "serious" double-disc masterpiece, *Sign o' the Times*. Or in 1991, when *Diamonds and Pearls* showed him leading a solid band through classic takes on what's become his very own genre. Or the next year, as his Top Ten hit "7" proved he could still rock with the best. Or even last year, when he generated a quiet storm with "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World." Whatever quirky turn His Yumminess takes next, there's no doubt he'll spin that Cuban heel with consummate panache, and invent pop all over again.

'80s, Prince blasted open pop's parameters, and every artist who crosses a genre today does so with a little Prince-dust on his or her shoes.

Not to mention anybody who crosses a dress. Sexual utopianism reached new levels of creativity in the '80s and '90s, as drag queens and hot dykas redefined rock stardom, and girls and boys both tried on each other's sensual identities for size. And it was His High-Waistedness who crystallized all the magic moments of rock polymorphousness

ANN POWERS

Newport



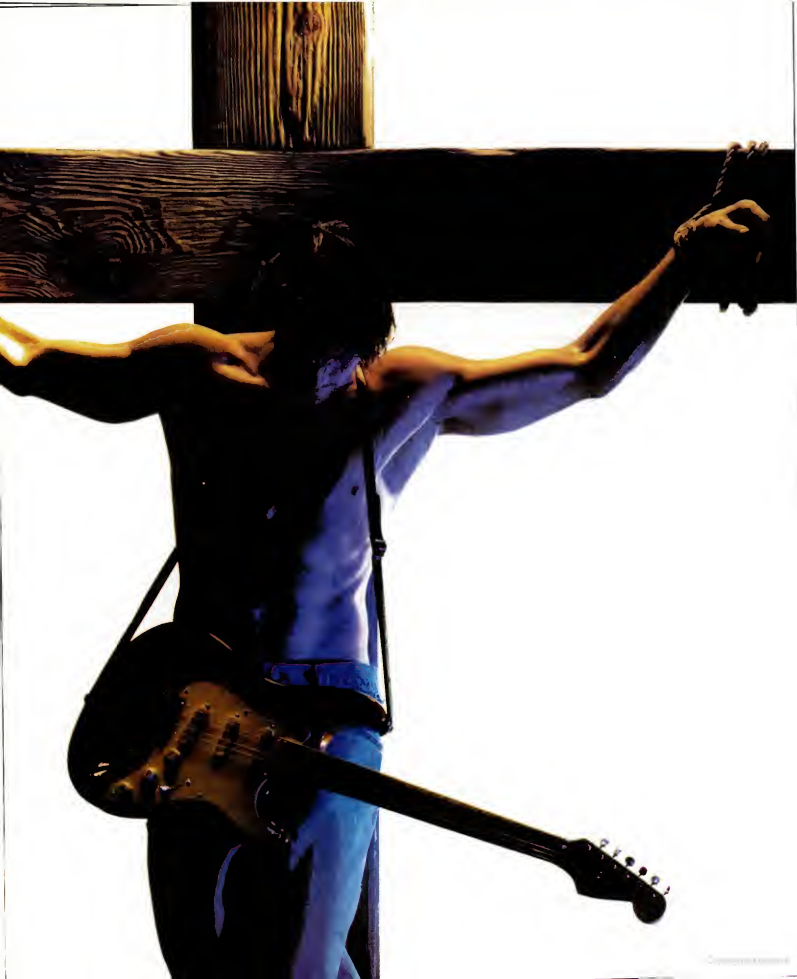
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6 Hüsker Dü



Hüsker Dü, from left: Greg Norton, Grant Hart, and Bob Mould.

Hüsker Dü didn't sound quite like a punk band, but it didn't sound like anything else, either. From the beginning, the prettiness and emotional heft of Bob Mould's and Grant Hart's songs didn't jibe with the one-dimensional scream-fest that constituted so much early '80s punk rock. Zen Arcade, the band's third LP, woke up the critics, and its next, *New Day Rising*, defined its approach: simple Beatles melodies in song structures stripped to their skeletons; dangerously sped-up tempos; vocals and amps cranked to distortion; and everything weighted down with intensely personal, carefully crafted lyrics. It wasn't an obviously innovative sound—in fact, next to R.E.M.'s poetic textures and the Replacements' crazy looseness, Hüsker Dü sounded almost reactionary—but its narrowness was a very complicated thing that wound up influencing a huge array of subsequent bands. Green Day borrowed Hüsker Dü's harsh tunefulness. Nirvana discovered a palatable format for depressive fury. My Bloody Valentine studied their feedback. The list of admirers and protégés is as long and various as that of any band's in rock.

In retrospect, Hüsker Dü seems to define American punk rock. Where most of the great postpunk and new wave records sound like kitschy historical curiosities, Hüsker Dü's records haven't dated one iota, probably because Mould and Hart were too set on honestly depicting their feelings to even consider fucking around. Sure, they lagged a bit along the way—especially on the growing pains LPs *Flip Your Wig* and *Candy Apple Grey*—but none

of their little experiments were without subsequent aesthetic rewards. By their final album and arguable masterpiece, *Warehouse: Songs and Stories*, Hüsker Dü had flowered into something beyond punk's wildest dreams.

Hüsker Dü was that rare band in which two distinct, equally talented songwriters competed in absolute harmony. Mould's and Hart's emotional similarities kept the band from sounding schizoid, but they had vastly different things on their minds. Mould seemed incapable of anything less than a pristine pop gem, no matter what mood he was in. Hart's songs were physically bolder, had a larger melodic vocabulary, and were less in control of their feelings. Because Mould has continued to make brilliant music, he has come to seem like Hüsker Dü's dominant force, but Hart was equally gifted, and is just as beloved by the band's admirers.

Never massively popular nor properly acclaimed during its brief and prolific existence, Hüsker Dü has become far more significant in retrospect, both for its extraordinary recordings and for the example it set. Hüsker Dü had complete integrity, from its earliest days on Reflex to its mid-decade heyday as critics' darling, to its final days on Warner Bros., when longtime fans mindlessly accused the band of selling out. Nothing fazed it. The band exemplified how to use the system and then get out before you were destroyed. In these post-Nirvana days, when the possibility of holding your own artistically amid the pressures of fame seems remote, it's important that Hüsker Dü be remembered.

DENNIS COOPER



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Guns N' Roses surprised me in 1987 simply by being search-and-destroy young punks who weren't afraid to sing and dance. They put energy, humor, vehemance, beauty, and rhythm—the whole wide world—back into rock'n'roll. "I sing in about five or six different voices—that are all a part of me," Axl Rose explained before *Appetite for Destruction* came out. The *New York Times*'s Jon Pareles said Axl could screech like a car alarm, a chainsaw hitting a railroad spike, or a tomcat locked out of a fish store.

A gasping woman climbs to the height of sexual passion in "Rocket Queen," but Axl doesn't tell us much about her, so I think the rocket queen is him. "Axl's voice flies Sylvester-high," disco expert Michael Freedberg wrote. "He thinks it's hard. In fact it's soft. *Thin. Chiffon*. But it's vast." GNR conquered the emotional terrains of both disco and punk rock.

Thanks possibly to their singer's manic-depression, the band's music reflected a tense tug-of-war between contradictory impulses. It constantly switches gears mid-song, schizophrenically changing verse structure, mood, and point of view—from smack-addict anger to junior-high-crush sweetness, from soul bass lines and church pianos to whistle solos and wreckless asides like "I never learn" and "eha-na-na-na-na-na knees" and "you're gonna di-ll-le."

Axl Rose can't stay in one place long. His dad boots him out for having long hair, so he escapes his suburban paradise city for the fucked-up urban jungle—"L.A. is where you and up," Izzy Stradlin once said. But

though he'd be powerless without the idea that fucked-up-ness is perfect bliss, Axl still gets homesick for green grass and pretty girls "so fa-a-ar away," or wonders in "Sweat Child o' Mine," "where do we go now?," like all that's certain is that he has to go. He says he feels like a fish out of water down here on the farm, and ain't it fun when you're always on the run and you've broken up everything that you've ever begun. His pre-*Appetite* Janis Joplin imitation, "Move to the City," was about an unemployed 16-year-old girl who fights her parents, then steals their credit card and returns to "Where it all began" (Axl is fond of Garden of Eden metaphors). But all she finds there is junkies and johns and "one big pain."

In 1988, Axl rewrote Rod Stewart's "The Killing of Georgia," about a small-town homosexual boy who takes a Greyhound to the big city and then gets fag-bashed, as "One in a Million." Only he changed the plot, adding ugly thoughts about blacks and gays. And this time, the fag-basher got hassled, too.

Guns N' Roses have caught hall avar since. Everybody assumes they're a washed-up anachronism, and they might be: "Sympathy For the Devil" is totally pathetic, and the last music they wrote (almost four years ago!) was an artsy mess without enough bongo-funk hooks or Axl high notes to rock much. On the other hand, their ridiculously overblown mini-movie videos are both fun and embarrassing, and *The Spaghetti Incident?* was one of 1993's best albums. GNR have even done a song ("Pretty Tied Up") about a rock group becoming a joke as time goes by. So it's possible they still have all the bases covered. **CHUCK EDDY**

7 Guns N' Roses



Guns N' Roses, from left: Slash, Steven Adler, Izzy Stradlin, Axl Rose, and Duff McKagan

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8 Dr. Dre

It makes perfect sense: At least one of these Top Ten artists had to get in trouble with the law. Pop music had been heading that way, getting angrier and more confrontational, both inside the business and toward the outside world. And while it would have been dashing if Dr. Dre had been charged with something political—killing a cop, say, or talking about killing one—it's fitting he's been booked for assault.

During the past ten years, hip hop brought the violence of the streets right into the heart of music. Dre got famous in 1989 as a member of N.W.A, the group that put gangsta rap on the map; his first act of public violence came two years later, when he slugged the female host of a hip-hop TV show. At the very least, he belongs on this list as an emblem of our troubled times.

But of course that's not the only reason he's included. N.W.A pioneered a sweeping new sound, and Dre, who co-produced its records, was responsible. While his DJ partner, Yella, laid down the beats, Dre created

a kind of hip-hop cinema, with actors, sound effects, and a gripping musical score. He brought L.A. hip hop decisively into the house, with music that could almost be a Hollywood answer to Public Enemy's noisy, dense, New York art rap.

In 1991, he reappeared with his own mega-hit, *The Chronic*. This wasn't one of those Frankie Knuckles or C+C Music Factory deals, where producers hire singers or rappers to front for them. Dre raps perfectly well, thank you, which—even if he's not an outstanding writer—makes him something rare in hip hop: a double threat, a star who can rap and produce.

Better make that a triple threat, because Dre is a mogul, too. Quadruple-platinum Snoop Doggy Dogg was the first act on Dre's Death Row label; the very popular, very lyrical Warren G is Dre's brother; and his management company, run by his buddy and manager Suge Knight, recently lured Mary J. Blige and Jodeci away from rival mogul Andre Harrell.

Which returns us to Dre the motherfucking gangsta. There's a dark rumor circulating that Dre and Knight showed up at Harrell's office with guns, and basically stole the two acts. True or not, the rumor reinforces Dre's sinister glamour. But remember: Violence isn't a black thing. It's 100 percent American, as Dre himself used to point out, back when he and his buddies in N.W.A argued that they weren't the first to glamorize gangstas—that distinction belonged to the movies.

There is in fact one Hollywood icon Dre distinctly resembles: Frank Sinatra. Sinatra's bodyguards would throw guests he didn't like out of other peoples' parties, which sounds very Dre. Listen to the conversations flying by on *The Chronic*. Listen to those sarcastic, sharp-talking men, who treat women like contemptible trophies, examine their world of money, power, and intoxicants. This is posse as Rat Pack.

Some say Sinatra's reign symbolized America's confident rise to world domination. Dre's reign represents the collapse of sentimental American bullshit, making way for the raw lust for power that always lay underneath. Let's hope it doesn't last quite so long.

GREG SANDOW



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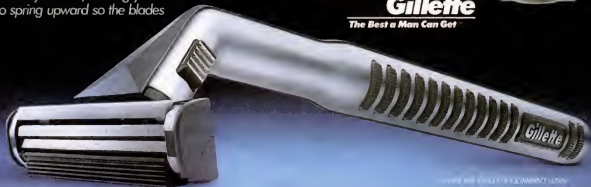
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Jane's Addiction, from left: Dave Navarro, Perry Farrell, Eric Avery, and Stephen Perkins.



9 Perry Farrell

What's great about Perry Farrell for some is what others hate: his pretentiousness. Not pretentious as in affected, but as in "making demands on one's skill, ability, or means." Farrell aspires. Not everything he reaches for is attained—he pressed auto-destruct on Jane's Addiction before they became the world historical force they ought to have been, while Lollapalooza was never quite the Woodstock-for-the-lost-generation some of us hoped. But that's hardly the point; the reaching is what matters. Farrell has achieved more than his peers simply by aiming higher.

The fanzine fascists who compared Jane's Addiction to Rush kept Farrell and Co. beyond the pale of hip. In the Amerindie worldview, "art metal" isn't a consumption to be wished for; it's a monstrous hybrid of all that you hold dear. For half of *Nothing's Shocking* and most of *Ritual de lo Habitual*, Jane's Addiction was Led Zep for a post-Banshees universe (Farrell's first band was the très Gothic Psi Com). Deluges of grandeur such as "Ocean Size," "Stop," and the 11-minute epic "Three Days" (which veered between Cocteau Twins drift and cosmic boogie) rank as some of the most majestic rock of the last decade. But what really lifted Jane's to another plane wasn't Dave Navarro's golden guitar hordes or Stephen Perkins's tribal funk, but Farrell's stratospheric voice. Elfin and androgynous, he sounded like a creature.

Farrell's shamanic shtick always reminded me of Jim Morrison, another

figure scorned by rock critics and indie hipsters, who pioneered the same Dionysian credo of impulse and living in the now, and for whom boredom, guilt, and deferral were the only sins. "Ain't No Right" paraphrased Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* in fluent rock'n'roll. By dabbling in pagan ritual and

its "just say yes" attitude to drugs, Jane's Addiction reinvented rock as a dark dive into the forbidden. And this heady aura of decadence and danger lured its motley following—a coalition of subcults (metal kids, Goths, skatepunks, hippies, indie fans) and non-aligned misfits.

The gathering of the tribes that occurred in miniature at every Jane's show expanded dramatically when Farrell launched Lollapalooza in 1991. Conceived as a mobile version of England's Reading Festival, hyped as a Woodstock-comes-to-your-town countercultural circus, Lollapalooza was the crucial prequel to Nirvana's breakthrough later that year. Underground elitists predictably sneered at "Lollapaloozers," perhaps sensing that their insular universe was about to be cracked wide open, their values mainstreamed and MTVed. But it's easy to forget how barren and bordered things were before alternative exploded and Lollapalooza became an institution, back when Bon Jovi and Poison ruled radio and MTV. Lollapalooza may or may not have defined a generational zeitgeist or mobilized the youth, but its more modest achievement is undeniable—a package tour of top alternative bands delivered to the kids nationwide, at a bargain price and without corporate sponsorship.

All right, Porno for Pyros was disappointing (did someone say Gene Loves Jezebel?), and Gift proved that Farrell is no Godard. But I wouldn't count Farrell out quite yet. Not an artist *this* pretentious. **SIMON REYNOLDS**

U2 got experimental in the '80s, after punk had driven home the point that guitar rock might not be the whole story. U2 got experimental despite the fact that it was a guitar band—even if the Edge chose rhythmic voicings and chords to belie this impression, and Larry Mullen, Jr., supplied thick, ongoing flows that conjured the uneasy swing of overseas discos. And the singer had mad notions to project his voice like an operatic tenor or trap it in harmonies like a Supreme—to croon, to care, to cast himself

romantically across the world that U2 was hell-bent to create.

U2 did what great people do: It transformed stuff.

Certain of the basics in

which it believed, it failed to notice the doubt or flatter the decay in Patti Smith's *Horses*; U2 latched onto its energy and drive, saw the black-and-white Technicolor. Desperate for solidarity, U2 raced past the dry, indifferent panic of PIL to refocus the friction and slightly brighten the buzz.

U2 began as four young Irishmen attuned to European formalism and the wide-open horizons of the American spirit. For seven years, U2 merged old and new worlds in its mind, sometimes tipping its always crucial balance one way (*War*), sometimes the other (*The Unforgettable Fire*). Some people put U2 posters on their walls; others called the band bombastic, overly polite, naive, or humorless. Paying scant attention to

fans and critics, U2 feared nothing: not ineptitude, scale, politics, age, fashion, or engineering. *The Joshua Tree*, labored over to sound as though crafted by tall angels, was the result.

The Joshua Tree grooved, rocked, worried, and sang like nothing before or since. It concentrated on a single field all the emotions the '80s neglected, all the sound-as-character, sound-as-object, sound-as-architecture, and sound-as-story that U2 had been looking for. The concentrations rang with such overwhelming intensity, in fact, that some listeners missed one of the album's most stirring qualities: subtlety.

Doubts and confusion about U2—its members were neither boomers nor X-ers, traditionalists nor indieanders—persisted. After years of either dodging these categories or ignoring them, the band met them head on as the '90s loomed, with clarity and coyness. Releasing *Achtung Baby* and *Zooropa*, they finally paraded themselves as the band they always were: Irish continentals who heard Ennio Morricone in Duane Eddy, Frank Sinatra in the Rolling Stones, Earth, Wind and Fire in Brian Eno. The result was music of majestic off-handedness, absolutely brilliant texts, and surpassing soulfulness. U2 had cumulatively established the standard for rock creativity and craftsmanship, a benchmark deeply felt but unhindered by regionalism, style, sentiment, or other limitations. Only then, amid the dislocation of techno and the drone of ambience, between slop and "One" or "So Cruel," did U2 smile somewhere beneath the 14th layered guitar track. It wasn't loud laughter.

JAMES HUNTER

U2, from left: The Edge, Larry Mullen, Jr., Adam Clayton, Bono





A full-page advertisement for Skechers Sport-Utility sneakers. Two men are shown in a dynamic, action-oriented pose against a background of yellow and black diagonal stripes. The man on the left is wearing a dark jacket, brown pants, and white Skechers sneakers with a thick sole. The man on the right is wearing a dark jacket, blue jeans, and white Skechers sneakers with a thick sole. The word "SNEAKERS" is written in large, white, block letters across the center. Below it, the words "SPORT UTILITY" are written in a smaller, white, block font. At the bottom, the text "get em' @ Jarman & Journey's All Stores" is written in a white, block font. In the bottom right corner, there is a logo for "Sport-Utility SKECHERS USA FOOTWEAR" inside a yellow and black striped shield shape.

SNEAKERS

SPORT UTILITY

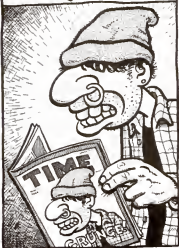
get em' @
Jarman & Journey's All Stores



Portrait of the Young Man as a Young Man

by Joe Sacco
©1995

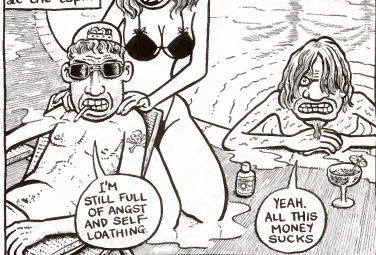
Ten years have passed and it's time to take stock...He's watched his entire world being co-opted, boiled down to its marketable essence, and sold right back to him...



He tells himself a lifestyle like his own cannot be easily replicated...Given his nurturing parents and middle-class background, it's taken a tremendous effort to get where he is today — malnourished, living on someone else's couch, and with the nipple-ring-of-the-month club threatening to hand his account over to a collection agency...



Meanwhile, the spokespersons for his generation, who've just gone multi-platinum, reassure him it's just as bad at the top...



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without any hassle.*

*You'll punch up your
card. Answer some ques-
tions. Smile for the built-in
camera. And walk away
with your new license.
Charged to your credit card
or deducted from your
checking account.*

*The do-it-yourself
driver's license.*

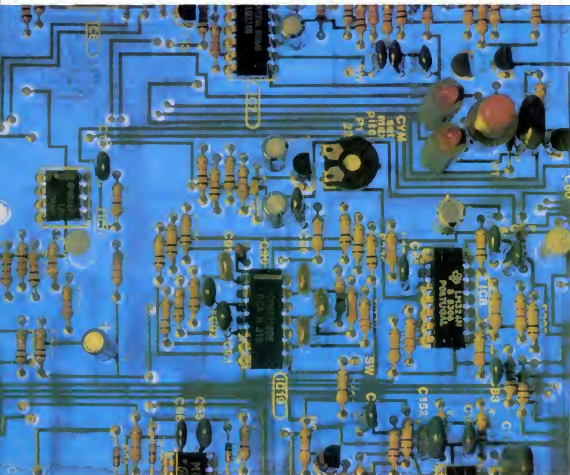
*The company that will
bring it to you is AT&T.*



The Chip

by Richard Gehr

You don't need to know how many bits are in a byte to realize that nothing has more directly altered our lives these past ten years than the microchip. Combined with the humble telephone, this subtle silicon sliver has bent the arts, business, politics, and personal relationships in unexpected ways. Not that life has become science fiction (that was in the '50s); it's more of a corporate nightmare for most, a "Dilbert" cartoon. Terms such as "virtual reality," "cyberspace," and "information superhighway" emerged from nowhere and filtered into mainstream consciousness, only to run aground just as quickly as nostalgic clichés. On one level, the whole digital thing has been more Toys "R" Us than NASA. As I write this on my Macintosh PowerBook, I'm listening to a compact disc of Future Sound of London performing ghostly ambient music created on synthesizers and computers. I'll probably take a break to fiddle with the SimCity CD-ROM, then dial up my





If you build it, they will come: SimCity's virtual metropolis.

favorite conferencing system—the Whole Earth Electronic Link (WELL)—to engage in cyberspatial mind games, discuss advanced parenting techniques, and argue the merits of Kathie Lee Gifford's surreal Christmas special with some of my 8,000 virtual buds.

These things give me extreme pleasure. I therefore worship the almighty chip. Nowhere, perhaps, has the digital revolution had a more profound effect than in the recording industry. Perhaps you remember the hand-wringing and critical squawking that accompanied the compact disc's introduction in 1982? The most strident opponents to CD clarity and convenience turned out to be those most anally fixated on records as groovy fetish objects—as if a diamond dragged across the grooves of a glorified, petroleum-based wafer (got to conserve those fossil fuels) was somehow intrinsically better than a laser scanning digitally encoded aluminum. Having recently invested several hundred dollars in what I expect will be my final turntable, I was happy to discover that my new Rotel makes old vinyl sound as good as new metal. But I still hate dragging my ass off the sofa every 20 minutes to turn the damn things over.

What has the world of pop gained or lost in the exchange of analog for digital? Well, imagine a Top 40 record store without sampling, which is to say, no Nine Inch Nails or Coolio. (And don't gutters sound remarkably quiet lately?) Fortunately for this magazine, music spins even faster than before. But that may soon change as more entertainment gets piped up

and down the chutes and ladders of the infobahn. Pay-per-view will inevitably engender some version of pay-per-hear. On the other hand, a staggering bounty of out-of-print music has found its way onto CDs in recent years as the past is repackaged for new media and new markets. Technology has helped transform the present into a permanent revival. As the protagonist of *Vurt*, my favorite new novel, asks: "If they can remix Madonna after she's dead, why can't they remix the night?"

But don't get nostalgic. Get moving. The fastest minds in the country belong to the most fervent net potatoes. More than ever, you are what you eat, online or off. Zippies, the raving adherents of technohumanism, compare the cyberspace of computer-enhanced communications to the hyperreal outposts of the psychedelic experience. Big business, on the other hand, wants to mail cyberspace over. For better or worse, America Online, Prodigy, CompuServe, and their ilk have sprouted like Wal-Marts. That sound you hear is the meter tick, tick, ticking away.

The big online services only recently began to offer access to the Internet itself, which actually celebrated

Technology has helped transform the present into a permanent revival. As the protagonist of *Vurt* asks: "If they can remix Madonna after she's dead, why can't they remix the night?"

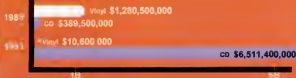
its 25th anniversary last year. The miracle of telnetting and FTP (file transfer protocol) allows the unlimited electronic importation of virtual libraries into your portable PC for a few bucks a month. Browsing software such as Mosaic and Lynx has led to the mushrooming expansion of the World Wide Web, which transforms each user into his or her own minipublisher. Still think technology turns people into clones? Get real. Never before has such a wild diversity of expression been available to so many people with well-developed typing skills. From alt.skateboard to alt.music.alternative, the net is a dynamic, seething here-comes-everybody of idiosyncratic delights.

The struggle for control of cyberspace is already in high gear. Will it serve the multinational communication corporations or succor electronic bodages? Perhaps the most provocative mantra of the past decade was "Information wants to be free." Phiber Optik (Mark Abene), Acid Phreak (Eli Ladopoulos), and other masters of deception did hard time for hacking corporate computers in enthusiastic adolescent dedication to that principle. But why not? Yesterday's teenage high jinks are today's sophisticated media techniques. If you think someone should go to jail for snagging access to the telephone system, how do you feel about a government that demands that very access? It took the intervention of the Electronic Frontier Foundation to temper the Digital Telephony Bill, which would have forced the appropriate companies to install wiretap capability into every communications medium. The same tight-assed folks who don't want you to download grainy pictures of Kennedy's breasts are just as eager to curtail the privacy of you, the citizen. And if you're a fan of hardcore chaos, just wait until the digital money starts flowing. Don't forget: The richest man in America sells software for a living.

Not that I don't enjoy scanning the invisible infrastructure myself on occasion. If the past decade's technological transformations have taught us anything, it's that, as Nicholas Negroponte, MIT Media Lab director, would put it, atoms will increasingly be transformed into bits, so that today's telephone book will be tomorrow's online resource. In a world where trees are an increasingly rare and expensive commodity, I call that a good thing. Ten years ago you could only read this on paper; today you might be reading it on AOL. While in another ten years...

The Stats: Then and Now

CD vs vinyl sales



Microsoft's net revenues



Sources: CD/Vinyl sales, Recording Industry Association of America; Microsoft's revenues, Microsoft annual report

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IF YOU DON'T GOT IT, GET IT.TM



by Michael Eric Dyson

Michael Jordan

Let's start with the irrefutable: Michael Jordan is the sublime master of basketball. The man who led the Chicago Bulls to their third consecutive NBA championship in 1993 and who anchored the United States Dream Team at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona is perhaps America's most revered athlete. He remains a powerful icon even after transplanting himself from the courts to the baseball field, embarking on a minor league career that, while mediocre so far, remains bracing in its nerve.

Unlike those past sports heroes constructed as demigods or political pawns, 32-year-old Jordan has never seemed more than human. He wasn't born a genius on the court; cut from the varsity team after his sophomore year of high school, he underwent a summer practice drill of his own design to make it back on. He's had his less-than-savory moments, such as his gambling troubles and his refusal to visit the White House after the Bulls' first championship season. But even after the publication of *The Jordan Rules* by sports writer Sam Smith, which purports to expose the myth's seedy side, Jordan's image remains untarnished.

Perhaps that's because Jordan's story has always seemed particularly American: It starts with talent and ends with financial power. Jordan follows Bill Cosby as the quintessential American pitchman. With enormous calculation, he and his skillful handlers have cashed in on the Michael Jordan image. Jordan eats Wheaties, drives Chevrolets, wears Hanes, guzzles Gatorade, and eats at McDonald's.

And, of course, he sports Nikes.

Jordan may not have been the first basketball player to ink a sneaker contract, but he changed the art of the deal. Endorsements had rarely gone to team players in the past—golfers or tennis stars usually got the fat. On the strength of Jordan's late '80s popularity, however, he not only secured one of the largest merchandising contracts ever, but Nike sold over \$200 million a year worth of Air Jordans during

the last five years of his basketball career.

Though basketball is enshrined in the metaphoric heart of African-American culture, Jordan has paradoxically transcended race to become an icon of all-American athletic excellence. In Jordan, the black male body, still linked to menace outside of sports and entertainment, becomes an object of white desire. And black desire finds

in Jordan's athletic ability the potential for wealth and fame. He has become the supreme symbol of black cultural creativity in a society showing ever less tolerance for the same black youth whose support sustained his career. Jordan reflects black culture's love affair with spontaneity and improvisation, its brash experiments with performance, its fascination with those who exceed limits. Jordan's expression of these elements creates the desire to, in the words of the famous Gatorade campaign, "Be like Mike."

In turn, Jordan has helped the business world exploit black ideals of cool, hip, and chic, which have undeniably influenced the look and sound of America. The deeper resonance of some of the styles can be problematic: The brand-name high-style sneaker, for example, reigns as a primary icon of consumer culture. Madison Avenue sends the message to acquire material goods at any cost, and that chant is piped into black urban centers where drugs and crime consequently flourish. Black youth learn to want to "live large," to emulate capitalism's excesses on their own turf. This force drives some black youth to rob or kill in order to realize their economic goals.

Jordan transcends these street wars. But no matter how high he soars, he still encounters racism. These incidents mock his desire to live beyond color—in his words, to be "neither black nor white," to be "viewed as a person." It's said, for example, that his reincarnation as a minor league baseball player springs from the thwarted passion he had for the game as a youth; the unspoken apartheid in his hometown encouraged white kids to play baseball and black kids to shoot hoops.

Jordan justifiably chafes under the indictment by some black critics that he is not "black enough." But perhaps he has not clearly understood the difference between pursuing a life beyond racism and seeking racial neutrality.

Despite the mixed messages Jordan sends, he represents a remarkable achievement in American culture. We must not forget that a six foot six inch American of African descent was the dominant presence in a sport that only 20 years ago was belittled as merely a black man's game, unworthy of the massive attention it receives today. Michael Jordan's story still suggests that anyone can reach the heights of excellence through talent and hard work. ●



Ronald Reagan

by Marc Cooper

It's a tough fact to face, but nevertheless true:

As we head for the end of the century, Ronald Wilson Reagan still stands as the most enduring American political figure of the last ten years, probably of the whole post-World War II period. It's tough to admit not only because his legacy is more infamous than positive, but also because, for a brief historical moment, it looked like the page might have turned on Reagan's America, and that 1992 would have brought us a better contender for the decade's political icon.

When Ronald Reagan was sworn in to his second term ten years ago, his revolution already seemed to have reached its high-water mark. Among those people who had resented being governed by General Electric's one-time pitchman, or those who had guffawed when he blamed trees for air pollution, there was already a growing giddiness, an eleted speculation that in spite of his brash first term, and notwithstanding the great communicator's Teflon image, Ronald Reagan would nevertheless wind up marooned on an island of relative historical obscurity, sharing space with the likes of Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover.

Indeed, just a few months into that second term, Reagan's world looked to be quickly unravelling. Somehow his previous four years in the White House had enshrouded him with an aura of infallibility and political wisdom. During his first term, Reagan and his handlers—supported in the wings by a generally supine press—had successfully performed an astounding series of sleights of hand: the greatest transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich in American history was simply dubbed "supply-side economics" and sold to the American people as a miracle nostrum; the radical slashing of social services (which helped spawn today's rampant homelessness and crime) and the reassignment of those monies to the Pentagon came to be known as rebuilding America; the MX missile was rechristened the "Peacemaker"; a Dr. Strangelovian Star Wars scheme to orbit laser guns around the earth was dubbed a nuclear umbrella (as if atomic fallout was in fact nothing more than the "hard rain" Dylan had sung of two decades before); ketchup was to be reclassified as a vegetable for whatever hot lunch programs were left serving in schools and with consequences we still suffer from today, colossal federal budget deficits were redefined as fiscal conservatism.

But then, all of sudden in 1985, the wheels of the Reagan juggernaut started to wobble. When Old Dutch announced plans to visit a Nazi honor cemetery in Germany while touring Europe, dire alarms were struck. After he called the Nicaraguan Contra mercenary army the "moral equal of our founding fathers," even the heretofore compliant U.S. Congress started turning off the funding for what had become the President's personal little war.

Barely a year later, the balloon burst. And those Americans who, like myself, had suffered through five years of official doubtthink finally got their reward for perseverance. A parade of sweating, frightened Reaganite cronies, from a lowly Marine lieutenant colonel to a suicidal National Security Adviser, right up to the austere, buttoned-down former secretaries of State and Defense squirmed before the Iran-Contra congressional investigators and told a TV-transfixed nation the sordid tale of

Back at Sky Ranch: Ronald Reagan in California just before his second term.

the White House trading weapons to the Ayatollah Khomeini for hostages and donations to the Contras (though Reagan to this day claims we all somehow misremembered).

By 1989, a deflated Reagan left office not with a bang, but with a whimper named George Bush, a fearless politician who couldn't tell a supermarket scanner from a tax-driven Laffer Curve, and who in turn would be routed from office by a slick governor from a small southern state.

Reagan, meanwhile, had ridden off to his Santa Barbara ranch...but not into the sunset. For as we flounder through 1995, it is his specter that still haunts the American body politic, proving that reports of his political death were vastly premature. Just ask Newt Gingrich and the other sons of Reagan who were sworn into the congressional majority this past January 4, all primed for the Revolution Redux.

To understand the staying power of Reagan's legacy is to see that his election represented more than the simple triumph of the conservative Goldwater-Nixon wing of the Republican party. Through much of this last century, the GOP was neatly cleaved between elite Wall Streeters and middle American Main Streeters. But Reagan brought to the helm of national affairs the ethos and political morality of a third species: the Easy Streeters. This class of fast-buck artists, hustlers, scammers, and leveraged-buyout engineers shared little of the grand vision of the conservatives who came before them. The Wall Streeters, in their quest for domination of world markets, at least had to take a strong interest in international affairs, in the health of national industry, in the minimal welfare of a workforce they depended on to keep cranking out American-made widgets. Likewise, the Main Streeters, with close ties to the land and to small businesses, had a life-and-death stake in their own communities.

But the Easy Streeters are stateless speculators with no allegiances whatsoever except to the latest profit-and-loss readout. They have no interest in, nor stomach for, the geopolitical shenanigans that kept Nixon and Henry Kissinger huddled into the wee hours, selecting bomb targets in Southeast Asia, plotting the overthrow of Chile's Salvador Allende, and courting the Chinese leadership. They couldn't care less for the truly conservative, even libertarian notions of Goldwater, who was as much interested in personal freedom as he was in a low tax rate.

That Reagan was out to serve and promote this new class should have been clear from the onset. "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" Reagan asked during his first campaign. Not, is the nation better off? Is America better off? Is your community better off?

And there we have in one insipid sound bite the kernel of Reagan's enduring legacy: the transformation of politics from a democratic civic ritual that benefits the whole, into an ever-more privatized mechanism that exists to benefit only the worthy and the deserving. Indeed, for all his saber-rattling about the evil empire, Euro-missiles, and international terrorism, Reagan couldn't have given a rat's ass for world affairs. When he finally found a war in which he could be guaranteed victory, he invaded Grenada, a country no bigger than Baltimore and less threatening. All in all, a sideshow.

Historian Garry Wills notes Reagan's "shrewd concentration" on domes-

tic affairs and ascribes the President's anticommunist bluster to nothing more than a fine-tuned "performer's feel for his audience." After three decades of Cold War fears being pumped out of the White House, Reagan's administration wasn't about to drop such a popular theme. But Reagan's real concern, argues Wills, was slashing away the regulatory, fiscal, and, I would argue, moral impediments to maximum domestic profiteering.

This is how Reagan will be remembered long after history has consigned Star Wars, the Contras, and even Ollie North to italicized endnotes. Reagan is the American president who restructured the economy and, more importantly, actually commenced the radical downsizing of both the American political system and American political thought.

But let's be fair. In this process, Ronald Reagan is only the transitional figure. The really dirty work is about to be executed by his political progeny, led by Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. Reagan, in serving as the

The American people have forgotten that it wasn't doofus liberals who busted out the national treasury on an arms-buying binge.

bridge between traditional conservatism and an articulated philosophy of greed, still paid lip service to the myth of the American social contract. With his telegenic smile, Reagan assured the proletariat that a high tide of prosperity would lift everyone's craft.

Greed, however, is like pregnancy. Once it has a foothold, if nurtured and encouraged, it usually comes to full term. And so a choleric Gingrich comes into our world kicking and punching, suckling the milk of Reaganism, but not mellowed by Reaganism's more avuncular nuances. The kind old Uncle Ronnie looking out for your welfare during the 1980s is now to be replaced by the stern militarized discipline of a state orphanage. Gone is the shining "City on a Hill" Reagan referred to so often in his speeches.

Gingrich draws his own sketch of a freer, better America, but his notion is not that the safety net has to be strengthened through some sort of trickle-down gimmick, but rather that it should be rolled up and locked away. To his mind, welfare creates poverty, not vice versa. Gingrich's opening speech to the House in January struck some uncharacteristically compassionate notes but they are in stark contradiction to his Contract With America. The stated legislative agenda of the new Republican majority hopes to create a tide that will, more than anything else, capsize the rickety dories and canoes of the underserving poor, the welfare mothers, the inner-city youth, anyone caught without a Rotary Club pin on their lapel. Meanness is now not only to be understood, but condoned, even encouraged.

Reaganism has taught us Americans to turn from nation and community to ourselves as individuals, from the general welfare and the common good to an obsession with our own material success, our own future, our own emotional satisfaction. With politics now redefined as merely a way for those who still vote to defend the scraps they can hold on to in the whirlwind of a global economy, with the public eye distracted from the commonweal, the American people can no longer identify the sources of our unease and our fears. They have forgotten that in great part it is thanks to Reagan and his comrades that we are now in such a mess. It wasn't countercultural McGovernites or doofus liberals who leveraged and eventually busted out the national treasury on an arms-buying binge, who cut gaping tears in the safety net and dropped millions of Americans on the street to scavenge and rob for a living, who oversaw the implosion of American industry and the disappearance of decent-paying jobs, who mortgaged our future and those of our children while instilling in them the ethical catechism of an Ivan Boesky or a Michael Milken. All that, you can chalk up to Ronald Reagan.

Recently there has been a wave of sympathy for Ronald Reagan, now reportedly afflicted with Alzheimer's disease. But this compassion is misdirected. More than Reagan, it is the American public that is losing its memory, its mind. ●



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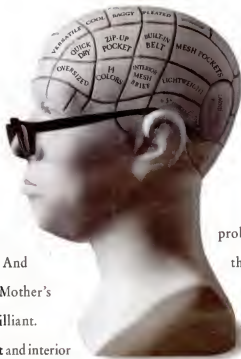
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MTV celebrated New Year's Day 1985 by playing the new David Lee Roth video every hour on the hour. "California Girls" was the quintessential MTV moment. Diamond Dave flopped around for the camera like a fish on a line, his body impossibly alive and clownish, turning the entire world into a backdrop for his smirk and karate kicks. He looked like someone born ten minutes ago, brimming with joy and determined to turn your head. "California Girls" openly mocked the idea that a world existed outside of MTV; Dave and his tour-bus

by Rob Sheffield

mtv



passengers were past the point of rescue, stranded deliriously in a realm of pure spectacle.

Spectacular hype has always been crucial to rock'n'roll, from James Brown's cape to the Sex Pistols' safety pins. But when MTV arrived in 1981, it delivered hype with a vehemence that made the starmaking machinery of the '70s look like Tinker Toys. MTV's impact on the music biz was so instantly explosive that the network itself seemed confused about how to respond. In the three minutes it took to watch a rock video on MTV, you didn't learn or care who the musicians were, where they'd come from, or what they'd experienced offscreen. But you saw how they looked, how they moved; you learned what their latest album was called; and you understood that a large audience out there didn't necessarily buy the early '80s rock radio consensus that rock was heavy metal and everything else was disco. Maybe you were seduced, maybe you weren't—there'd be another video on in a minute.

MTV was obviously a smoke-and-mirrors show, reducing the hard-won professionalism of '70s rock to a hype parade over this or that flavor of the month. But MTV was just as obviously a gas, a place where unexpected things happened and new languages were invented. This version of rock'n'roll left out the bits about universal truth and beauty and turned up the volume on everything crass, loud, and garish. It was a place where a disco dolly named Madonna could play hopscootch with her girlfriends and shoot pool with her boyfriends in "Borderline"; a place where a young hermit named Michael Jackson could dress up like an ice-cream sundae and teach hoodlums to dance in "Beat It"; a place where Def Leppard fans, Depeche Mode fans, and English Beat fans could crack each other out, crack each other's codes, and take whatever they wanted.

Of course, for all we know, MTV would rather have been hyping heavy metal all along. It certainly didn't plan on creating a new audience, and it played the living daylight out of Triumph, Zebra, and every other dodgy metal act that could be coaxed in front of the camera. But with so much space to fill—24 hours a day—MTV had to allow weirdos into the mix.

No matter how much MTV wanted to fit in with rock radio, there wasn't anything straight or narrow about A Flock of Seagulls' haircuts.

While waiting for the mainstays of rock radio to get with the program, MTV got stuck with Haircut 100 and Haysi Fantayzee, Duran Duran and A Flock of Seagulls, karma chameleons and vegemite sandwiches. But something strange and unexpected happened: the weirdos became superstars, at least for a while, and some of them even became superdeuperstars, opening up fissures in the rock'n'roll audience that have been widening ever since.

Many rock fans understandably saw MTV as a demonic sign that the jig was up. This wasn't music, was it? All those groups with octagonal synth drums, sideways haircuts, and names that sounded like seafood recipes? As one concerned journalist wrote in 1983, "MTV is playing fast and loose with the music. The idea of attaching songs to a series of images is a blow to imagination and ambiguity." This sounded pretty silly even at the time—rock'n'roll is fast and loose by definition, unless it's the Grateful Dead. Still, you could understand the despair. Rock'n'roll had always squeezed lots of creative juice from a naturalistic, folk-based sensibility, the fantasy that the sound you heard on the record was the unmediated passion of the artist getting in tune with the straight and narrow. It's a sensibility that inspired the Clash no less than James Taylor. No matter how much MTV wanted to fit in with rock radio, there wasn't anything straight or narrow about A Flock of Seagulls' haircuts.

Plenty of rock stars thought MTV was beneath their dignity. Joe Jackson was the first to announce he was no longer going to sully his

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music with the degrading process of video promotion (not that anyone was clamoring to see Joe's dour little mug on any kind of screen). Ever since, refusing to be on MTV has been a popular way for stars to demonstrate their integrity. Prince, the Smiths, the Replacements, George Michael, and Pearl Jam all renounced videos at some point in their careers. Such deep thinkers as Peter Gabriel and David Byrne made "serious" videos that looked like art films without any of rock video's animating sleaze. Art films, meanwhile, began to look like rock videos.

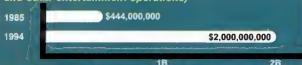
By 1985, MTV was struggling to keep up with the changes it had produced. Most of the big stars were making videos, determined to get in on the conversation, and MTV saw no reason not to play them. Some of them learned to cavort and shake their butts onscreen, and good for them: Lionel Richie's "All Night Long (All Night)" and Bruce Springsteen's "Dancing in the Dark" were career highlights. Unfortunately, a far more common formula was to drown some drab rock star in special effects. Two of 1985's biggest videos were Dire Straits' "Money for Nothing" and Tom Petty's "Don't Come Around Here No More," a couple of expensive, technically innovative videos that were too boring for words. Petty spent most of his video sitting down; Dire Straits' Mark Knopfler spent his with sweatbands on his wrists and forehead. Sweatbands. Something was wrong here. In its eagerness to define the mainstream, MTV was contributing to its own sweatbandization, playing a game it couldn't win. And although the network probably considered itself daring for hyping a video in which Knopfler denounced the typical MTV star as "that little faggot with the earring and the makeup," the joke was on MTV.

The network has walked an uneasy line ever since. On one side, the hammy, look-at-me performers who make the channel fun to watch; on the other, the tight-assed directors marking time until they can graduate to soft-drink commercials. Van Halen's 1984 "Jump" was a self-directed, relatively low-budget video. Van Halen's 1991 "Right Now" was a tasteful, clever, sterile montage of special graphics that looked exactly the same when it became a soft-drink commercial. "Jump" lives in the soul of everyone who has seen it, while "Right Now" represents MTV's idealized vision of itself as a serious art medium. MTV wants to grow up—to become just like the stodgy rock radio it replaced in the early '80s. What keeps MTV interesting is its inability to mature; it generates images faster than it can nail them down.

If MTV has a moral, it's that everything it touches, serious or trivial, turns to hype. No matter how hard MTV tries to crack the youth-culture code, it ends up showing that what codes mean is inseparable from what codes do, and what codes do is get lost in confusion. When MTV makes a gaffe, we stay glued because MTV's confusion is a little bit of everybody's confusion, absurdly inflated to pure hype. As a result, MTV accidentally does what Gertrude Stein insisted every great artist must do: It tells us what it knows. ●

The Stats: Then and Now

Annual revenues of Viacom Inc. (owner of MTV, VH-1, and other entertainment operations)



Number of cable television subscribers



Sources: revenues, Viacom Inc. Annual Reports; cable subscribers, Cable Television Advertising Bureau

PJ Harvey To Bring You My Love

New album out now.



Can you match each of the Young Ones with their vomit?

1) MIKE



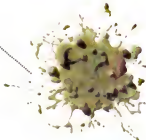
a) MOSTLY LENTILS.



2) RICK



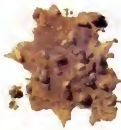
b) CHUNK OF EDIBLE UNDERWEAR. CLUMP OF CURLY BLACK HAIR.



3) VVV



c) BREAD MADE BY THE WORKERS' POPULAR FRONT, RUSSIAN VODKA.



4) NEIL



d) GRAIN ALCOHOL, BLOOD AND ONE HUMAN FINGERNAIL.



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1 Got role as "Little Edgar on The Family Plot. Made \$50,000.00
I was actually 14 yrs old



6 JOINED NARCOTICS ANON.
GAINED 85 POUNDS.
LIVING IN CAR.



2 Spent \$ on a Lamorghini.
Show got cancelled
I started drinking.



7 JOINED OVEREATERS.
ARRESTED FOR
LOOTING IN L.A. RuTs



3 Traded car for
Fashionable Dog
Kennel. Went to
AA hoping to
meet girls.



8 DOING CONSTRUCTION WORK IN
MALIBU....STARTED
A FIRE WHEN I
TOSSED CIGARETTE
BUTT



4 Sent dogs to Cindy
Christina Applegate
& others. IRS
takes rest of eggs.



5 Attend Debtors Anon
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Turtle. Spent
\$ on blow.



9 Join Smokers Anon.
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**JOSE
CUERVO**

PRIMO TEQUILA.

The Christian Right

by Elizabeth Mitchell

When the vast PTL ministry came tumbling down in 1987, no one was terribly shocked. No one, that is, except the 116,000 supporters, swindled out of more than \$100 million by televangelist Jim Bakker during his career of bright-light, barker-style televised preaching.

The charges came fast and furious: Not only that he had perpetrated the financial fraud, but that he had paid \$265,000 in hush money to secretary Jessica Hahn after a hot tussle in a Florida motel. Bakker resigned, then literally crawled into the fetal position. His tearful wife,



Reverend Jimmy Swaggart resigns from his ministry in 1988.

Tammy Faye, her mascara running in rivulets down her face, magnanimously forgave him. Or at least she did temporarily, until she divorced the scoundrel two years ago.

It seemed so predictable to most that these high-octane spiritual circuses, where viewers charged salvation to their Visa cards, would harbor charlatans. At the time of Bakker's fall, 35 television stations were owned by religious organizations. The humiliation of some of the biggest stars came quickly: Oral Roberts went on the air with a "contribute or else I die" campaign, insisting that God would strike him down unless the coffers were filled to the brim. The cynical prayed for the thunderbolt, but none ever arrived. Then Jimmy Swaggart confessed to having cavorted with prostitutes, and took a temporary leave of absence from his ministry until God ordered him back on the job.

In retrospect, the media was too quick to dismiss the religious right after Bakker. The analysts assumed that the unmasking of the evangelists, the weak presidential campaign bid of 700 Club star Pat Robertson, the losing battles in Congress over school prayer and abortion, and the dissipation of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, spelled the defeat of religious conservatism in America. But it's hard to write off, for example, 14.6 million Southern Baptists, or the viewers in the 55 million homes receiving Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network. And behind every tear-soaked, jail-bound preacher is another leader waiting to ride herd over the lost sheep.

Just one month before Bakker checked into prison, Robertson began paving the way for a Christian uprising. At a Washington benefit earlier in the year, he had met the 28-year-old conservative organizer Ralph Reed and had sketched out his plans for a new organization. The Christian Coalition was founded before the year was done, changing the face of American politics. Gone was the cult of the individual in this new enterprise, at least temporarily. Instead, they concentrated on the kind of grueling district-by-district organizing that the left has lately been loathe to do.

That this new movement is no more based in genuine spiritual conviction than was the ministry of Jim Bakker is obvious. The furious battle between liberals and conservatives over the last ten years has come down to an ideological war, one that pits the rights of the individual against the rights of the family to control the environment beyond the boundaries of its own house. The for-

mer is what the country is based on, the latter a Constitutionally superfluous concept that nonetheless seems, to some people, to be badly needed. And since the law itself is on the side of those whom Christian conservatives consider the left, the Bible-wielders have been forced to fight the battle to institute moral prohibitions not in the courts but in the trenches—in libraries, movie theaters, and holiday parades, usually for the purported welfare of children.

In Xenia, Ohio, religious-conservative school board members fought proposed self-esteem programs because of the threat they could pose to parental authority. Within one year of the Christian Coalition's targeting of school boards, reports of censorship in the classrooms and libraries increased by 50 percent. In a general plea for support of the conservative agenda, New York's nonsectarian Family Defense Council begged in a newsletter: "Join us now! Help David overcome the gay Goliath!"

Anti-choice and anti-gay, the Christian right is, alas, doggedly anti-fun since the butt of their campaigns is often what the Catholic liturgy enticingly calls "the glamour of evil." Second Lady Tipper Gore had this tyranny of sin in mind when she launched her crusade against explicit rock lyrics in 1985, crediting the words with encouraging suicide and fragmenting families. While a flaxen-haired trio, the Gore girls, were winding their way through elementary school, their mother, then a Senator's wife, was busy founding the Parents Music Resource Center to ensure that the girls would spend their pubescence clipping warning labels off their albums on the way home from the store. The result wasn't always so benign: when labeling arrived at the turn of the decade, some store chains refused to carry records bearing the mark.

And Gore had succeeded in reminding conservatives that when it comes to obscenity, rock'n'roll is a goldmine. In 1986, Jello Biafra of the punk band the Dead Kennedys was charged with distributing harmful material to minors after he pointedly packaged a poster of disembodied genitalia inside the album sleeve of *Frankenchrist*. He was later acquitted, but whiled away a year in the courtroom fighting the charges and his company went bankrupt. First Amendment advocates were forced to defend the spirit of such 2 Live Crew lines as "lick my asshole till your tongue turns doo-doo brown" on national television, while rapper and label owner Luther Campbell became a rich man.

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Whereas in the '50s patriots tried to ferret out the pinko commie in their midst, in the late '80s conservative America sought Satan. The National Endowment for the Arts came under attack—with quick punches at the erotic photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe, the chocolate-coated performance of Karen Finley, and the piss-pickled Christ of Andres Serrano. Pepsi pulled its TV ads featuring Madonna after conservatives in a pious and some would say racist lather screeched about her simultaneously released video of "Like a Prayer," which showed her sprouting stigmata and paying homage to a Christ both black and kissable. In 1992, elder statesman Pat Robertson wrote a letter to Christian Coalition members in Iowa attacking the state's proposed Equal Rights Amendment; it was, he wrote, part of a "feminist agenda," which encourages women to "leave their husbands, kill their children, [and] practice witchcraft." And he, like Kate Jackson, was supposed to be the smart one. Fetch me the eye of Newt.

But the most enduring and complicated fight of the religious right has been the war over abortion. In 1989, the Supreme Court gave the states power to restrict access to abortion in whatever way they see fit, as long as they do not undercut the fundamental right itself. A handful of 24-hour waiting periods and parental consent requirements resulted, and the Christian right took its cue that the time was ripe to throw body and Bible against abortion facilities. In 1991's "Summer of Mercy" in Wichita, Kansas, 2,600 pro-life protestors were arrested. Arson and chemical attacks against clinics increased, as well as more personal harassment campaigns against the doctors themselves. Those tactics culminated in the spring of 1993, when Michael Griffin shot Dr. David Gunn as he entered his Florida clinic. According to Griffin's minister, the assassin had been to church the Sunday before: "He asked...that we agree with him that Dr. Gunn would give his life to Jesus Christ."

The country might have hoped that this incident would be the climax of this frantic war, but unfortunately, it wasn't. Since then, eight more people have been shot, four of them fatally.

With the trouncing of the Democrats last November, the Christian right seems to have grown quieter, trusting its new or invigorated Republican representatives to fight its battles. Or perhaps its silence is a sign of a new sobriety, brought on by the fact that extremists, attracted to some of its leaders' flamboyant rhetoric, have begun murdering in the name of God. It would be nice if this country didn't always favor the person who yells loudest (the decade gave us Rush Limbaugh, and now he's a rich man, too). The Christian Right slings slurs, the left fears that all America is filled with fascist pods, and we remain divided. But even the officers of this army are starting to shift focus. Ralph Reed, with his movement now one and a half million strong, and his budget at \$13 million a year, allows that Evangelicals are probably more interested in debating taxes, crime, and education than abortion, gay and lesbian rights, and prayer in school. Is he just trying to attract new constituents, or have the old followers grown tired of the vitriol? God only knows. ●

Research assistance by Leigh Anne Fitzpatrick.

The Stats: Then and Now

Incidents of violence and disruption against abortion clinics in the U.S.



Percentage of people who think religion is losing its influence on American life



Sources: abortion providers, National Abortion Federation; religion, The Gallup Poll News Service

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by Julia Chaplin

Prison Culture

David Bland admits that business has been pretty good lately. As vice president of marketing for Norment Industries, the largest prison construction company in the United States, he has watched national spending on his industry balloon from \$4 billion a year in the mid-'70s to \$30 billion in 1994. Still, Bland admits, the government's financial prospects might not be as sweet as those of his company. "You listen and you listen good," he says in an Alabama drawl. "The construction of a prison represents

less than 6 percent of what it costs to operate the facility. The debt we are creating for our children and our grandchildren is astronomical."

Indeed, the future may be too bleak to contemplate. Over the last ten years every aspect of crime and punishment has soared: killings, cost, containment. The U.S. prison population surpassed one million last year, yet the streets have only gotten more dangerous, especially for the young. Homicides by juveniles have almost doubled; gang killings have almost quadrupled. "The '80s were a big social experiment where we decided to triple the prison population and see what effect it would have on crime," says Dr. Barry Krisberg, president of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. "It wreaked havoc on the family social structure. We now have more black men



In prison than in universities. Of the 60,000 women in prison, 80 percent have kids. All those children are in social limbo."

The equation that appeared so easy to politicians and frightened citizens for so long—fighting crime equals incarceration equals a few more tax dollars—has turned into a runaway disaster. Republicans now want to hit harder. Democrats want to rehabilitate. Crime rates continue to soar. The only thing anyone seems able to agree on is that something has gone horribly wrong.

The most seismic shift in prison culture in the last ten years can be blamed squarely on college basketball star Len Bias. In 1986, he overdosed on crack cocaine, and in an effort to console the public, Congress pushed through mandatory minimum drug sentencing, a system of penalties rigidly based on the weight and type of drug. "There was a kind of hysteria that spring on Capitol Hill," recalls Eric Sterling, a staff council to the House Judiciary Committee at the time. "Any member of Congress that wanted to get reelected that fall saw backing stiff drug penalties as a way to court public sentiment."

The measures were meant for drug kingpins and international dealers, but instead have nabbed come doper pushers, "mules" (people hired to carry drugs across the border), and rebellious suburban kids. Last spring, the Justice Department released a report showing that low-level, nonviolent drug offenders account for 21.2 percent of the federal prison population and are serving more time than robbers, rapists, and kidnappers.

Written into the minimums were skewed distinctions between what constitutes a "dangerous" drug. For example, images of black gang warfare and stories of crack babies stirred Congress to push for a mandatory minimum sentence for crack cocaine 100 times more severe than for powder cocaine. They supplied no medical studies to back up the decision. And the racism soon became glaring: African-Americans comprise 90 percent of the defendants charged with crack possession.

Some federal judges have refused to go along with the mandatory sentences, calling them unconstitutional. Attorney General Janet Reno, the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, and the American Bar Association also are critics. Even Clay Shaw, a conservative Republican congressman from Florida, who introduced the minimum bill in the '80s, now says he thinks it's time for "Congress to step back and see if what we're doing is working."

If drug hysteria was yesterday's news, then gang violence has become the terror of the moment. To a public hardened by images of hypodermic needles and cocaine raids, new life has been found in teens toting semiautomatics through metal detectors in public schools.

According to a USA Today/CNN opinion poll, Americans hold juveniles accountable for almost half of all crime, when actually they commit about 13 percent. Still, the statistics are climbing. Krieger blames the availability of guns. "Adults are marketing guns to kids in the same way that drug dealers targeted young women for crack," he says.

Politicians afraid of losing their jobs last November supported "get

tough" measures such as the death penalty and the "three strikes you're out" policy, which would give life sentences to people with multiple violent offenses. That these measures are neither cost-effective nor preventative is Washington's little secret. An execution costs \$2 to \$3 million and spans a decade in legal proceedings. About 30 people are killed this way each year. Critics call the "three strikes" policy superfluous, since by the time offenders swing their last "strike," they have already racked up almost life imprisonment. "The law's only effect will be to turn prisoners into giant geriatric wards," says Victor Streib, a law professor at Cleveland State University. "We'll be spending \$80,000 a year on wheelchairs and round-the-clock care for the elderly, when we could be using the money to incarcerate dangerous, violent offenders who can actually walk."

Though new prisons are being built at a frantic pace, they cannot contain the influx of convicts. New Jersey is housing inmates in tents, North Carolina is shipping prisoners to Rhode Island, and Texas and Virginia are storing inmates in local jails until space opens up in state prisons. Prisons in 41 states are now under court order to correct overcrowding and poor conditions.

And since incarceration is no longer punishment enough in the eyes of the public, politicians have spawned a "make life miserable" trend. An Arizona county jail sheriff stopped letting inmates drink coffee and replaced hot lunches with sandwiches, trail mix, and fruit. A law was passed in Mississippi banning electronic equipment such as radios and TVs from prison. The same law requires prisoners to sport jailbird stripes with the word "convict" sewn across the back. A member of the Mississippi legislature was quoted as saying, "When you see one of those boogers alose, you'll say, 'I didn't know we had zebras in Mississippi.'"

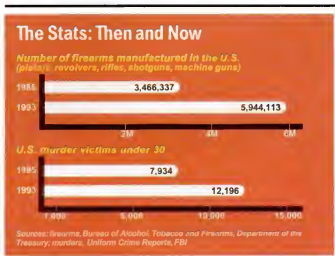
When Dr. Lee Brown, Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, talks about the crime bill, he focuses on the \$5.4 billion set aside for prevention programs. "Most thoughtful people understand that you can't just arrest people and build more prison space," he says. "I can tell you that firsthand."

Brown started as a patrolman 35 years ago. He later became police commissioner for two of America's most crime-ridden cities: Houston, and New York. He bristles at the suggestion that his support of prevention programs isn't reflected in U.S. policy. "I am the U.S. policy," he says in frustration. "We know what needs to be done. We have the strategy to carry it out. But Congress isn't giving us the resources we need."

An entire economy has now sprung up around prisons, much like the military-industrial complex in the previous decades. Magazines such as *Prison Life* and *Corrections Today* have proliferated and boast growing circulations and advertising sales. Stock prices for private prison management companies such as Wackenhut and Corrections Corp. of America nearly doubled in the aftermath of the crime bill. In California, prison guards have become so numerous that they now run the most powerful lobbying group in the state. In a depressed coal mining region of southwestern Virginia, contracts for four new prisons have prompted the community college to add a new course of study, "Correctional Systems."

But as prison culture becomes more entrenched in the economic and political life of the country, fear-baiting, one can assume, will only grow more intense. A 1994 USA Today opinion poll found that 37 percent of Americans listed crime as the nation's most important problem, compared with 9 percent the year before, even though the rate for murder, the most serious crime, has remained stable for those two years. Not coincidentally, the economy has improved and politicians in last year's elections needed a new drum to beat. The disastrous effects of politicizing the legal system was well-documented in the failed "War on Drugs" of the '80s. The danger of making the same mistake with the coming generation looms. Already 781 bills stiffening penalties against juvenile offenders were passed in the last legislative session. Some 70 percent of all prisoners are under 34. A whole generation is being sent to bed without any supper.

In a recent article in the *New York Times Magazine*, author David Anderson wrote that America invented penitentiaries in the 18th century because the citizenry believed flogging, hanging, and mutilation to be "cruel and unusual punishment." Now, observes Anderson, Americans have abandoned their belief in rehabilitation and have reverted back to punishments that reflect anger. Either we learn from our mistakes in the '80s and depoliticize crime, or we will continue to be governed by the hysteria of headlines. ■





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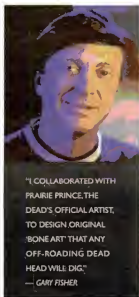
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PC

by Tom Carson

Sometime in the late '80s, a Pointlessly Clumsy Public Contagion began to Pollute Conversation—Poisoning Campuses, Punishing Caucasians. Promising Civility, the Provocative Concept only Produced Contempt. Peevish Conservatives, out to Preserve Calumny, Protested Constantly against this Prissy Conspiracy by Pushy Censors, which they thought was Pretty Creepy. The whole Peculiar Controversy has led to Perfect Confusion, not to mention Plaintful Comedy, for Puzzled Citizens. Pilgrim Crimes? Poor Columbus!

Everyone knows what "PC" stands for. But to anybody with an appetite for social justice, dealing with Political Correctness is like taking a giant bite out of a worm sandwich. All that blechy wriggling sure isn't anything you're about to swallow—but you can't figure out how to get rid of it without spitting out the bread, too.

In all its manifestations, political correctness has set off the biggest ideological feud of our times. Yet the topics of debate are about as often arcane if not ridiculous, and even on campuses, the number of people directly affected by the battles over PC is absurdly small. The reason why these ivory-tower wrangles have become such a big deal is that they dramatize a much bigger debate that really does affect

all of us—you know, the one about how, or maybe I mean if, a country invented by and for straight white guys will adjust to all the formerly marginalized people who aren't one or any of those things.

It has to be said that if I were a right-winger, I couldn't wish for anything better than having what ought to be arguments about basic stuff, like tolerance and diversity, turn into arguments about PC instead. Honest—if liberals are going to be dumb enough to frame issues this important in such bizarre and off-putting terms, not to mention in an academic context that is elitist by definition, do they even need enemies? Considering that Rush Limbaugh and Newt Gingrich don't have any trouble getting millions of people to agree that even a corpore fuddy-duddy like Bill Clinton is a commie from Mars—or a "counterculture McGovernik"—it's a cinch that, especially with the forces of reaction back in the saddle on Capitol Hill, political correctness has turned into just about the worst advertisement for the liberal agenda imaginable.

Most PC'ers now claim that the expression started out as a joke. Inspired by the late, great Chairman Mao's plug for "correct thinking" in the Little Red Book that, for so many '60s radicals, was the *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* of its day, leftists used the phrase to mock their own self-righteous streak. If there's a lesson in this, it's that people who are deservedly famous for not having any sense of humor should probably steer clear of trying to make jokes. The punchlines have a way of backfiring.

The side of PC that has caught most people's attention is its jargon, which has already provided material for a few

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thousand comedy routines—and no wonder. The point of the insult-proof circumlocutions we're being told to use to describe each other these days often seems to be that we'll get along much better once none of us knows for sure who or what anybody else is talking about. We should probably be grateful that at least the rules aren't retroactive. Maybe the new Miss America is hearing-impaired, but Beethoven, God bless him, is still deaf. But the language issue that is troublesome isn't about the terms PC'ers try to impose, but those they want to prohibit. Not just disapprove of—punish. Even allowing for right-wing exaggerations and distortions, of which there have been plenty in the press, there are enough PC horror stories around to give any democracy fan misgivings, like the one about the professor who waggishly wondered in class if *Penthouse* would have to call its centerfolds "companion animals" now that animal-rights activists have declared the word "pet" derogatory: He got hit with a sexual-harassment suit from 15 female students.

It's no big mystery why political correctness first reared its beauty-impaired head when and where it did. During the Reagan years, colleges were just about the only places in America where liberals had any clout. But the sinister right-wing scenario about pinko profs stuffing their students' minds with un-American propaganda conveniently leaves out the students themselves, who as often as not were the ones agitating to be propagandized. Affirmative action, feminist gains, and the immigration boom had given many U.S. campuses a big new population of people who'd always been marginalized before—and since these beneficiaries of the liberalism of the early '70s were hitting college in the middle of the retro rollback of the '80s, they had plenty to be fired up about.

Even so, most of the public first learned about political correctness from the right-wing backlash against it—which ought to have tipped them off that something more was at stake besides reading lists, or goofy new rules of etiquette. PC's excesses and asininities, of which there were no shortages, gave right-wingers a perfect pretext for underhanded attacks on the threat that some really want to see discredited, which is minority empowerment. The campaign against PC hasn't been exactly what you'd call a grassroots operation. The National Association of Scholars, the main opposition group of academics, is financed by the same ultra-conservative foundation that spent the '80s setting up and bankrolling right-wing student newspapers nationwide.

In 1988, when minority students at Stanford successfully leaned on the university to change the name of its old "Western Culture" undergraduate program to "Culture, Ideas, and Values," and to loosen up the reading lists to allow more room for non-white, non-male authors, right-wing journalists played up the affair as if multicultural Armageddon had finally come. As it turns out, only one of Stanford's eight undergraduate tracks was even affected; the lurid stories about Plato and Shakespeare being banned from course lists to make room for the likes of third world firebrand Frantz Fanon proved to be pure myth. The students now had the option of studying Fanon along with plenty of others—and that was all there was to it.

Or was it? Two years later, Stanford—like a lot of other colleges—also adopted a speech code, which is a whole other kettle of fissures. (The University of Michigan's version, which was later declared unconstitutional, was also the funniest: along with race, gender, and so on, the list of taboo topics included anyone's "Vietnam-era veteran status," which kind of makes you suspect that the people who put the code together spent the war a long way from the Mekong Delta.)

It's true that our last Republican president, who wanted to ban flag-burning, made a pretty unconvincing advocate for freedom of speech when he attacked political correctness at the University of Michigan in 1991. But even so, let's not beat around George Bush: speech codes are the issue that make PC'ers deserve their reputation as the thought police. As veteran First Amendment defender Nat Hentoff has written, the message sent by penalizing hurtful language is that "Censorship is okay provided your motives are okay," and if there's one thing of which all the censors in history, from Stalin to Jesse Helms, have been convinced, it's that their motives are unquestionable.

To tell the truth, the most wonderful thing about this whole debate is that nobody on either side comes off well. Right-wingers and left-wingers compete to see which of them can be more sanctimonious and repressive, and it never occurs to any of them that they're arguing with a mirror. As I tiptoe out of the room to leave them to it, here's all I want to know: without getting sued, is it still okay to call people jerks? ●

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by Jonathan Bernstein

Heathers

One word convinced Hollywood that adolescent spending power was a force to be reckoned with: *Porky's*. That rough-and-tumble celebration of the days before date rape became a consideration ushered in a decade of horny high schoolers, computer geniuses, privileged emotional cripples, and adults who ran the gamut from stumbling buffoons to intransigent fascists. Then, one word stuck the nail in the coffin of the '80s teen flick: *Heathers*.

Pastel-shaded but blacker than black, the 1989 story of the homicidal tussle to reclaim the queenhood of Westerburg High from the clutches of the three titular witches flew in the face of conventions established over the course of an era of teen-stroking. *Heathers* screenwriter Daniel Waters's appreciation of the John Hughes canon was somewhat soured by the Tycoon of Teen's insistence on always laying the blame for adolescent trauma on, as Waters says, "the goddamned parents! I was like, 'Hey, you're missing the fun of it all.' Some of the most despicable, diabolical people in the world are 12. To act like evil is something you mature into is ridiculous. The good thing about high school is it exists outside adult supervision. Parents are just these vague figures in the background."

The point that high school could, for the downtrodden, be synonymous with hell, had been made in maybe a million movies. But few of those films featured a cool clique that wreaked havoc over the lower castes with such impunity as did the icy troika of *Heathers*, with their vicious deployment of aristocratic cheekbones, withering gazes, exquisite taste in accessories, and atomic-impact cruelty. Fewer still employed argot like Heather Chandler's opening gambit: "Fuck me gently with a chainsaw!" Waters's script was so densely packed with such fruity turns of phrase that Winona Ryder proclaimed it, with characteristic understatement, "one of the best pieces of literature I've ever read." She also labeled her part as Veronica Sawyer, the *Heathers*' reluctant accomplice, "the role of my life." Hard to believe now that Christian Slater's career has become little more than a public service announcement on the perils of becoming a Young Hollywood Asshole, but he too was at the top of his game. As Jason Dean, straddling and eventually teetering over the line that separates smoldering dreamboat rebel from drooling psycho, he gave the movie its meat. His cheerful offing of the offending elite, and subsequent stagings of the slayings as suicidal reactions to adolescent angst, reeked of an audacity that had critics calling *Heathers* the *Dr. Strangelove* of teen movies. (The conventional shoot-'em-up climax, in which Veronica saves the school, remains a bit of a letdown, mind you, but it pales in the face of Waters's original, much darker ending, in which Veronica blows the school up.)

Up until *Heathers*, no feature had dared to trawl adolescent angst for the dark, bitter, cynical humor lurking at its heart. Teens aren't so much catered to as openly mocked—kind of like the way they treat each other in real life. At the same time, the film was as sophisticated as it assumed its



Neutral born killers: Winona Ryder and Christian Slater, dead cool in *Heathers*.

audience was. "It was the first film for a lot of people with actual artistic aspirations," muses Waters. "It was their first experience of nonboring pretentiousness. It's not *Rumble Fish*."

While the movie filled few seats, its tart dialogue ("Don't be so very") and gleeful viciousness still amaze, and its influence spread beyond the cinematic, becoming a bellwether for indie culture (one case in point: Unrest's appropriation of Big Fun's "Teenage Suicide (Don't Do It)"). The main reason for its endurance is probably that, like *My So-Called Life*, the audience and the subject matter are not one and the same. "People start to enjoy *Heathers* after they leave high school," says Waters. "If there is a lesson to be learned from *Heathers* that's therapeutic, it's that I could always enjoy the cruelty of high school because it was entertaining. If you realize the entertainment factor of your pain, you're going to be in good shape."

Try telling that to Martha Dumptruck. ●

What SPIN means to some Virgin artists:

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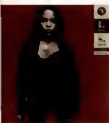
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My Birthday Spin!



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by **Simon Black**

Sex, Drugs, and Other Vices

One day in 1985, just as **SPIN** magazine was being born, an angel appeared on the shoulder of American Psyche and said, "Get into a 12-step program before you kill yourself with all this cocaine snorting and carousing."

At the same time a devil appeared on American Psyche's other shoulder and said, "Don't be a wimp. Do whatever you want. You're the boss. Party on!"

But despite the devil's urging, many celebrities across America proceeded to recovery, including Drew Barrymore and the two guys from Aerosmith and lots of other guys who really liked to party. Even Ozzy Osbourne went on the wagon.

"See," said the angel. "Everybody's doing it."

So American Psyche gave in to the angel and followed the celebrities into a life of sobriety.

And it was good.

Then one night in bed the angel reappeared on the shoulder of American Psyche and shouted, "Stop having casual sex! Get yourself a blood test! And if you do have monogamous sex, use a condom at all times, even during oral copulation."

"Are you kidding me?" shouted the devil. "During oral copulation! That's ridiculous! Don't believe the hype!"

But by that time it was impossible to find anyone to have sex with,

because everyone else did believe the hype.

And so American Psyche became monogamous and practiced safe sex. And it was hard.

But then one day at work, the angel shouted, "Stop! Don't eat those potato chips! You need to cut fat out of your diet. Otherwise you'll die of a heart attack when you're 50."

"Who cares?" said the devil. "We've all gotta go sometime. Eat whatever you want. You're not fat. You look great. You're the boss."

But soon it was impossible to eat potato chips because American Psyche was working in a no-chipping office (secondhand potato-chip noise had been proven to be damaging to ear drums). So instead of going all the way downstairs to eat the potato chip in the parking lot like some kind of criminal, American Psyche decided to eat a carrot instead.

"No, no, no!" shouted the angel. "Don't eat that carrot. It's shaped like a penis, and there's a female co-worker nearby and that constitutes sexual harassment. Never handle any object that could be mistaken for a penis while in the workplace. And never talk to members of the opposite sex. And don't touch children, not even to pet their heads. You'll end up in jail."

The devil was worn out.

"All right, whatever," said American Psyche.

"And don't just sit there. Get down to the StairMaster and start climbing. Otherwise you'll die, do you hear me? Of a heart attack! Or a stroke! Come on. Get moving!"

"Okay, okay," said American Psyche.

And he looked over his shoulder for some entertainment while he was trudging up the StairMaster.

"Well, I might have some ideas," said the worn-out devil.

When American Psyche got home, the devil showed him some 900 numbers, and American Psyche talked dirty over the telephone and masturbated and the devil was happy. The angel was concerned about the cost.

"It's a dollar a minute, you know," the angel said.

"But it's safe sex," said American Psyche, as he hurried to finish himself off. Afterward American Psyche was bored.

"Don't worry," said the devil, and he showed American Psyche all kinds of neat things he could do with his computer, like downloading pictures of naked ladies and typing dirty things to people on the other side of the country and masturbating while he did so...

"All this masturbation," said American Psyche. "I'm getting bored again."

"Hang in there," said the devil. "Soon there will be virtual sex machines, and you'll actually be able to make love to Cindy Crawford with your 486 computer."

"Great," scoffed American Psyche. "More masturbation or pseudo-masturbation. That's all I need."

And he didn't seem to be cheering up at all.

The angel came to the rescue.

"Look what I brought you," he said. And he handed American Psyche a copy of *Cigar Aficionado* magazine.

"Don't cigars cause cancer?" questioned American Psyche.

"Of course," said the angel. "But you're not actually going to smoke them. You're just going to become fetishistic about them. You're going to collect them and buy special boxes to put them in, and trade them with friends and spend a lot of money on them, and it will be your neat little hobby. Isn't that fun?"

"No," said American Psyche. And now he was depressed. And the angel felt sorry for him.

"Come on," said the angel, and he took American Psyche down to the beauty parlor, where they gave him a beatnik goatee and stuck a tattoo on his ass and pierced his nose and made him look like a real rebel.

American Psyche and the devil watched TV together. They saw rock stars blow their heads off. And they cheered up a little. They might not be having fun, but at least they weren't dead.

"There," said the angel. "Now you look real cool."

"But he's not cool," scoffed the devil. "Behind the fashion statement he's nothing but a goody two shoes."

"Because he's leading a healthy life? Because he's not destroying himself with drugs or sex?"

"Because he's a wimp!" shouted the devil.

And while the angel and the devil were busy shouting at each other, American Psyche started crying into his nonfat triple decaf latte.

"See what you've done," sneered the devil. "You've bored him to tears."

And soon both figures were getting splashed by the tears that fell from American Psyche and sprayed onto his shoulders.

"Emotion is good for you," said the angel, tentatively. "It's healthy to cry."

"But I feel like shit!" blubbered American Psyche. And it was obvious from his desperate tone that they had a real crisis on their hands.

"I'll be right back," said the angel, and he disappeared.

While he was gone, American Psyche and the devil watched TV together. They saw movie stars die from drug overdoses and AIDS. They saw rock stars blow their heads off. And they cheered up a little. They might not be having any fun, but at least they weren't dead.

The angel came back with a huge jar of pills.

"Prozac," read American Psyche. "What's that?"

"It's a drug to make you feel better," said the angel.

"But isn't that where this whole thing started," complained American Psyche. "With you getting me off drugs?"

"Yes, but this is a good drug. One without side effects. You'll still be able to go to work and watch television and live a healthy life."

"A healthy life, a healthy life, a healthy life," repeated American Psyche, his eyes widening. And soon he'd gone insane and slit his ex-wife's throat and flown to Chicago and checked into a hotel and cut off his own penis and sewn it back on and starred in a porno movie and married his adopted stepdaughter and bumped off a figure skater and stuffed himself with steroids and lost his two gold medals and eaten his victims and renamed himself Christ and called for mass suicide.

"Yee-ha," cried the devil, and he rode American Psyche through the killing spree like a bucking bronco.

"Hi there," purred Madonna, when American Psyche had finished his marauding. "I saw you on Oprah. And I like your style."

"Help!" cried the angel and the devil both, as the Material Girl took off her clothes and jumped on American Psyche and fucked him over and over again until he did not enjoy it any more.

"You're overexposed," he said to Madonna.

And she swore at him on Letterman, hired both his angel and his devil to be back-up dancers for her next tour, and left American Psyche alone.

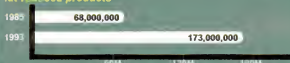
At last. ♡

The Stats: Then and Now

Number of people, ages 18 to 25, who have used marijuana at least once during year



Number of Americans consuming low-calorie and/or fat-reduced products



Sources: marijuana use, the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, sponsored by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; Low-Cal/Fat-Reduced products, National Consumer Surveys by the Calorie Control Council

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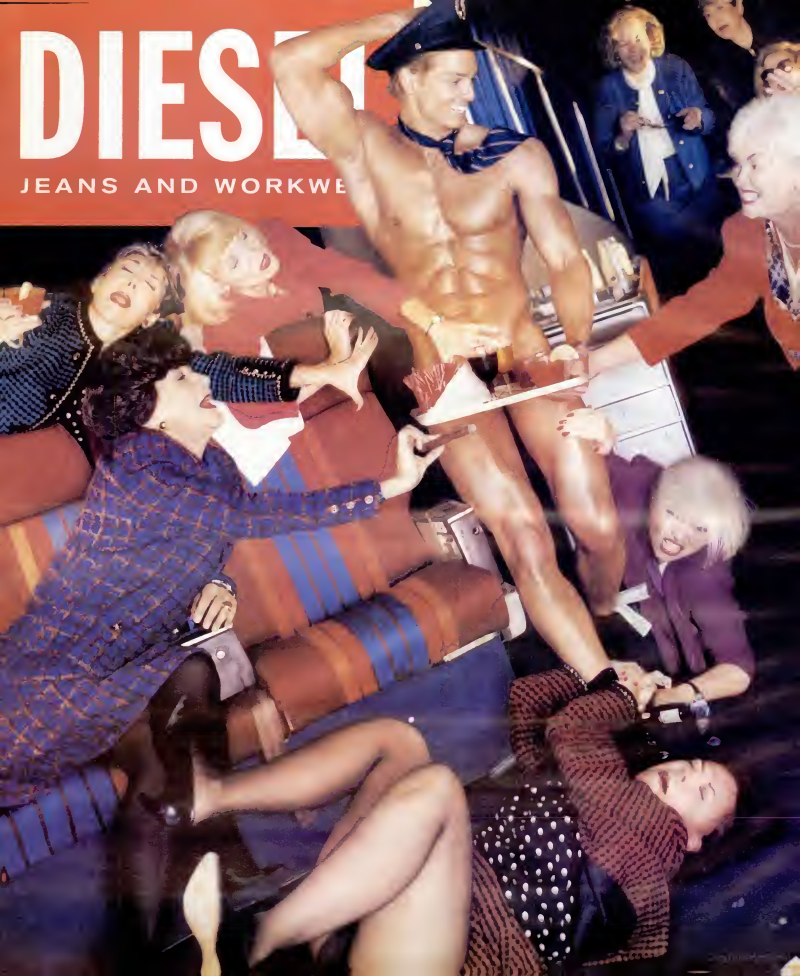
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TEN IMAGES THAT ROCKED THE WORLD '85-'95

Where were you when the Challenger exploded? When the Berlin Wall tumbled? Here are the most unforgettable moments of the last ten years.

The Live Aid Fiasco

The 1984 charity single, "Do They Know It's Christmas?," set the stage for the following summer's Live Aid extravaganza. This pair of 16-hour musical marathons, held simultaneously in London and Philadelphia, featured stars old and new.

On the concert's anniversary, SPIN Staff Writer Robert Keating reported that organizer Bob Geldof and his "trustees of compassion" had failed to take Ethiopia's political realities into account when they began shipping food to the starving nation. Supplies were diverted by the military, only to become ammunition in the country's internal wars. The hundreds of millions of dollars in aid that flooded into Ethiopia went to buy weapons, not food.

Live Aid's failure demonstrated a simple truth: There is no such thing as a purely selfless act of generosity. When musicians, comedians, and models strut their stuff for a larger cause, all too often their real goal is image enhancement. The big-deal benefit concerts of the '80s did symbolic penance for the Reagan era's excesses. The current economic disparities are even harsher. What's still needed is more education and activism, and less crap like "Do They Know It's Christmas?"

RICHARD GEHR



In 1984, the Korem Camp in Ethiopia saw 100 refugees arrive and 50 die each day. Robert Keating's investigation of Live Aid's failure appeared in SPIN's July 1986 issue.



The Challenger Explosion

On January 28, 1986, all America's eyes weren't on the skies, they were on their televisions. That morning, the space shuttle *Challenger* arced gracefully into the blue over Cape Canaveral and, after 73 seconds aloft, experienced what NASA Mission Control understated memorably as a "major malfunction."

Lost in the horrific blast were six astronauts—Dick Scobee, Michael Smith, Judith Resnik, Ronald McNair, Ellison Sizuka, Gregory Jarvis, and a schoolteacher named Christa McAuliffe, chosen by President Reagan to be America's first civilian in space. Lost too were a nation's blithe hopes of

conquering the new frontier with ease. In that 74th second, manifest destiny met the terror of the technological unknown and the idea of space exploration as some kind of *Star Trek* fantasy was wrenched back to earth. Space is the place, as both Sun Ra and Tom Wolfe have pointed out, but in that moment it seemed to vanish.

The silent explosion only became more surreal as it replayed hour after hour on TV. We thought, if someone somewhere could just hit rewind then maybe we could start over. But we couldn't. We can't. And perhaps that was the most shocking realization of all.

JAY STOWE



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Oliver North testifying at the Iran-Contra hearings on Capitol Hill in December 1986.

Iran-Contra

The first story I wrote on Iran-Contra in the fall of 1986 was part of a special series for the *New Republic* in which we alleged that an unknown National Security Council officer named Oliver North was running a covert arms resupply network to the Nicaraguan Contras in violation of federal law. Elliot Abrams, then assistant Secretary of State, wrote to the magazine's publisher, Marty Peretz, declaring it was all a lie.

North, of course, has since admitted to having run the network, and now Abrams is a convicted liar, having pled guilty to federal charges that he misled Congress. That was about all the justice that came out of the Iran-Contra Affair. Almost none of those convicted ever did jail time, and Chief Executive Ronald Reagan walked away without punishment.

Through the endless hours of televised testimony, we learned the scope of the scheme: American arms were traded to the regime of the Ayatollah

Khomeini in exchange for the release of U.S. hostages held in Lebanon and the diversion of profits from the arms sales to the Nicaraguan contras.

But if the lesson of Watergate a little more than a decade earlier was that the "system" worked, as journalist Jonathan Schell argued in 1973, the lessons of Iran-Contra were ultimately just the opposite. What Iran-Contra represented was nothing less than extraconstitutional government, secret from the American people, exempt from congressional oversight, and conducted outside the law. We learned that the national institutions that are entrusted with checking a lawless presidency—Congress, the courts, the press—were either not up to the task anymore or simply themselves corrupt.

As a result, an entire new generation of Americans no longer believes in its nation's civic religion. The consequences of this latest development are not known, but there is no reason, as of now, to be hopeful. **MURRAY WAAS**

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PETER TURNER/BLACK STAR



Tiananmen Square

Deng Xiaoping had hoped Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Beijing would be among the brightest moments in his biography—the first Sino-Soviet summit in 30 years. But Gorbachev arrived, on May 15, 1989, to find a revolution. More than 1,000 university students were camped in Tiananmen Square, vowing to starve themselves until the government entered a dialogue. A half a million supporters surrounded them, effectively exiling China's autocrats from the symbolic heart of the nation. The welcoming parade planned for Tiananmen Square was held on the airport tarmac instead.

The protests spread to some 150 towns across China, involving over ten million people. China's rulers declared martial law, but the people kept coming, throwing themselves in the path of the advancing troops. Finally, on June 4, as the movement entered its eighth week, the government opened fire on the protesters, killing hundreds.

I felt the remarkable spirit of the movement in the first days of martial law, when Li Lu, a key student leader, married his girlfriend, who had come 1,000 miles to find him, in the Square. With guns and tanks poised and helicopters buzzing overhead, the thousands at the ceremony were filled with hope. The Square, the heart of China, belonged to them.

Tiananmen Square is now remembered only as a stain of blood on an otherwise euphoric year of transformation in the Soviet bloc. But history is not as simple as a crumbling wall or a candlelight vigil against the dark. Since 1989, while Eastern Europe has floundered in financial collapse, China has become the fastest-growing economy in the world, not because of its government, but in spite of it.

On June 4, the government lost not only its international legitimacy, but also its small reserve of national loyalty. Still nominally in power, China's autocrats are now as impotent as shadows. Like all shadows, when the hour is right, they will simply fade away.

DREW HOPKINS



In early May, the protest in Tiananmen Square was still peaceful. Mikhail Gorbachev covered the scene in the square in the August 1989 issue of SPIN.

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1985-1995

Ten Years That Rocked the World!



J. LANGENSTROM



The Berlin Wall and the Collapse of Communism

What could be more rock'n'roll—assuming the term still applies to the energy that is released when power and authority corrode—than the almost biblical collapse of the ten-foot-high, 27-mile-long concrete Cold War monstrosity known as the Berlin Wall?

The November 9, 1989, opening of the wall was not just a historic turning point, but a moment of global delirium—absolute good triumphing over absolute evil. The East German government did not intend to open it: Communist party Chairman of Berlin Guenter Schabowski, reading from a prepared statement, announced at a press conference an easing of travel restrictions. Word soon spread and thousands arrived at the checkpoints, testing the confused border guards. In the heat of the chaos and with the world's media watching, the disgruntled guards had little choice but to let them through. It was better than anything Hollywood could have imagined.

And it triggered the most sensible, bloodless, and triumphant revolution of modern times, culminating in the collapse of Soviet-dominated communism in Eastern Europe and shortly followed by the breakup of the Soviet Union itself. In Prague, a week after the wall fell, art students turned their school into a printing plant for revolutionary banners, blasting music that to their ears still meant something: the Clash.

I remember being transcendently happy in front of my TV set for days, watching the drunk, howling Germans dance all over the wall. I bought myself a bottle of cheap champagne, phoned SPIN, and begged them to dispatch me to Berlin before the party was over.

I didn't make it. I arrived in Berlin at night, and went straight to the wall. Everybody was gone, and it was dark, with hundreds of champagne bottles smashed on the ground. Still, I had fulfilled my pilgrimage. I touched the wall and for a split second I felt weightless.

The Berlin Wall was more than just a symbol of Communist oppression. It contained, in its prime, enough concrete to build a small town, enough barbed wire to span the earth. It was lined with 50,000 armed guards, over 200 observation towers, over 100 stations for attack dogs, and 245 bunkers and rifle pits. Hundreds of people were shot trying to cross it.

Its collapse was one of freedom's greatest victories.

Forget the '60s. This was the decade in which to be young.

CELIA FARBER

The celebration on the Berlin Wall, November 10, 1989. Celia Farber covered the fall of communism in the February 1990 issue of SPIN.



When you
realize those most likely
to succeed, didn't.



Dewar's





The Gulf War

The U.S.-led air attack on Iraq began in January 1991, six months after Saddam Hussein invaded neighboring Kuwait in retaliation for various alleged affronts. Conveniently, the first bombs fell at 6:40 P.M. eastern time, just in time to juice up the national news with live footage.

At the time, I pointed to all the myths generated by the two-month skirmish that were spoon-fed to a supine press corp by the government—e.g., that “smart bombs” were effective, that Patriot missiles were downing all the SCUDs, and that the “crack” Iraqi Republican Guard was a serious challenge to Western forces. Now I know better. The corporate media doesn’t need Pentagon minders to coax them to serve the military’s agenda. After fighting ceased, Pentagon briefer Pete Williams joined NBC, while the ceaselessly self-promoting General Schwarzkopf finagled \$6 million for his ghostwritten memoir and CBS specials.

So what did we learn from the war? Bush: out. Saddam: still in. Human rights? A casualty in not-so-democratic Kuwait as well as in despotic Iraq,

particularly for the Kurds, Shi’a Muslims and dissidents. Plus we’ve got a United Nations infanticide underway, courtesy of the economic sanctions imposed in August 1990. In 1990, 8,903 children below the age of five died in Iraq. Last year, the number was 29,558. These are the real victims of this war, which continues on by other means, no longer subject to around-the-clock boosterism on CNN. Who cares about Iraq these days? No medicine. No food. No news.

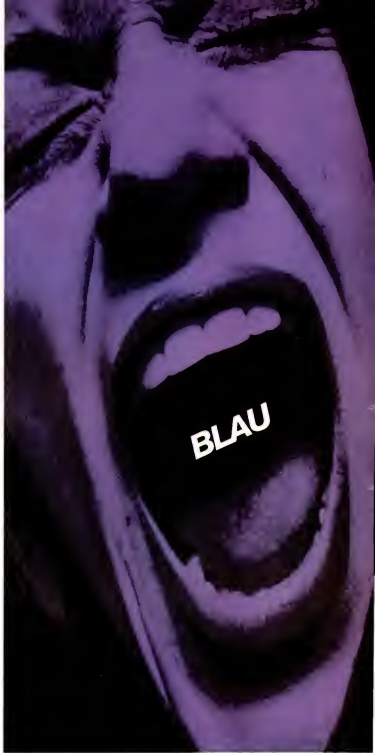
DANNY SCHECHTER

Bombed-out cars and trucks on the highway from Kuwait after Allied attacks in March 1991. Schechter’s investigation of the government’s manipulation of the media during the Gulf War appeared in the February 1992 issue of SPIN.





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The L.A. Riots

It was Thursday, April 30, 1992, and I was headed south, racing through the streets where I grew up, and still live. Los Angeles was in flames. The local bowling alley was torched, the movie theater incinerated, a nearby gas station just a blackened lattice-work of steel. The day before, Reginald Denny's 18-wheeler had rolled to a stop at the corner of Florence and Normandie, where looting was already underway. This isolated bit of mayhem almost turned murderous while television's impotent eye broadcast live, with no commercial interruptions.

Meanwhile, Daryl F. Gates, L.A.'s notorious Chief of Police, thought it was cocktail hour. He sped across town to Brentwood to raise money to oppose, of all things, a ballot measure to reform the LAPD. But it didn't matter. The verdict from the mostly-white jury in the case against the four police officers who beat Rodney King had come back "not guilty." And Los Angeles had cracked open.

This was made evident to me when I stopped at an intersection barely a mile from my home. At all four corners small crowds had gathered, and as we made eye contact, the new reality of Los Angeles seared me. I was the white interloper on black turf. A hammer-welding man rushed at my car, which I immediately slammed into reverse. The crowds laughed as I high-tailed it toward safety.

The Los Angeles I knew was gone. The 1992 riot hardened L.A.'s apartheid and made it more than geographic. Today, three years later, apartheid is the state of mind that governs my city, and undermines my hopes for its future. GREG GOLDIN



Right: L.A. on fire the day the jury's decision was announced. Mario Van Peebles assessed the riots in SPIN's August 1992 issue.





ED CARREON/SPA-PRESS



Waco

By the time I arrived in Waco, Texas, on the 28th day of the siege on David Koresh's compound, the media had already attracted a sideshow five miles from where the Branch Davidians waited out the standoff.

There were white teddy bears for sale, the ones with the black button eyes and red sash that read "I'VE BEEN TO MOUNT CARMEL." Then there were the groupies, like Crazy Linda, who carried her wizard doll slung over one shoulder and told me she was the prophet of the lion come to reason with the lamb.

I remember the arrogance of Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms representative David Troy at the daily press conferences, and how sheepish he looked, months later, at the congressional hearings on the event.

But mostly I remember how I was back home sitting at my desk on April 19, transcribing tapes for my Waco article, how every voice rose and fell with the same rich Texas twang, how in the middle of the day I turned on the TV and saw the pink compound completely enveloped in flames.

Koresh's very American interpretation of the "cult of the individual" was especially dangerous when it met with followers hungry for community. And it was made more dangerous still when the government entered the mix. Whether you call it religious persecution or the reinstatement of law and order, the Branch Davidians still burned to death on national television, and like Manson two decades before, Koresh became a generation's guitar-slinging madman; ringmaster of the decade's greatest pre-millennial multimedia event.

DARCEY STEINKE

Steinke's story on the rock'n'roll world of David Koresh appeared in SPIN's July 1993 issue.



GREG GANTZ/ASA

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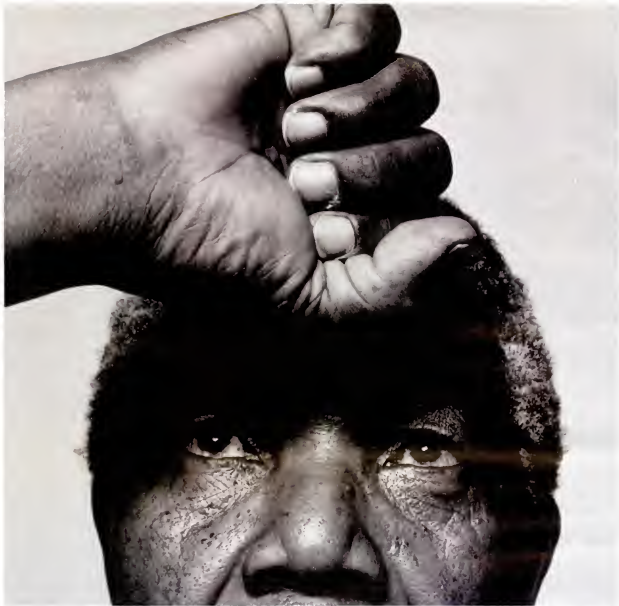


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Nelson Mandela in 1990.

The End of Apartheid

in Tom Stoppard's play *Night and Day*, foreign correspondents are characterized as "people who fly around from hotel to hotel and think the most interesting thing about any story is the fact that they have arrived to cover it." The glorious exception to this truism was the South African elections. Reporters who I had previously seen unabashedly wearing their egos on their flak jackets in places such as Bosnia, Romania, and Belfast were transformed and almost humbled by the events of April 1994.

My first morning in the country was grisly. I came upon the dismembered corpses of nine people, black and white, lined up in the center of Johannesburg after a massive car bombing. It was two days before polling stations opened, and word spread that white extremists had been behind the blast. Every outside observer believed the election itself would be a bloodbath. That it wasn't is testimony to the extraordinary, albeit tentative, trust forged between the majority of South Africans and, above all, the almost universal respect accorded Nelson Mandela. It is astonishing to remember that, when SPIN was launched, Mandela was still in prison and

considered a terrorist by the apartheid authorities and by most South African whites.


Two weeks after the bombing, Mandela was inaugurated in Pretoria, the scene of his trial 30 years previously. Every moment of that day seemed to offer a symbolic image—Mandela embracing Cuban leader Fidel Castro, F.W. de Klerk attempting to boogie to an old black protest anthem. But the one image that has stayed with me most is Mandela sitting at the head of a post-ceremony banquet table. After pouring Mandela a drink, the white waiter looked at the president and slowly bowed his head. Mandela had squared the circle.

JOHN RYAN

Ryan's report on the South African elections appeared in SPIN's September 1994 issue.



OSCAR NYOMA



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The Chase

On the evening of June 17, 1994, 93 million Americans watched the image of a white Ford Bronco flit across their television screens. Either O.J. Simpson was on the lam, or Ford was filming a 90-minute infomercial in which an affable Hertz Rent-a-Car spokesman holds a gun to the head of an aging football star while leading Nordberg, the goofy police officer from the *Naked Gun* movies, on a low-speed car chase through the streets of Los Angeles.

Whatever was really going on with O.J., the surreal spectacle confirmed what we already knew; television had stopped making sense some time between the Reagan administration and *The Real World*. As the white Bronco crashed through the barrier that once stood between fiction and reality, we just may have reached the zenith of postmodernity.

A guy that Americans welcomed into their homes every weekend for two decades was huddled in the back of a truck cradling a cellular phone. If O.J. did murder Nicole and her friend Ronald Goldman, then he wasn't the man our TVs had led us to believe he was. But like a battered wife return-

ing to an abusive husband, more than a third of the country plopped back in front of the tube that night looking for the real O.J. Was it going to be smiles and handshakes, or blood on the windshield?

Except for those watching NBC, which simulcast Game 5 of the NBA Finals in a corner of the screen, the Bronco chase wasn't even a very good show. The play-by-play guys were underinformed, the cars moved slowly, and the ending sort of fizzled. It wasn't the video image that made the chase so riveting. It was that the event was fully interactive. Whether waving a "JUICE IS LOOSE!" sign from a highway exit ramp or watching it live on the other side of the globe, everyone was a part of it. Observers and participants were one.

At a steady 45 miles per hour, the Bronco traversed the boundaries that separate news from entertainment and real life from pretend. By the time it was all over, the world was a little bit smaller and a lot more weird.

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Quote, Unquote

A sampling of the prophecies, soul-baring confessions, and one-liners printed in **SPIN** over the years. You heard it here first!



Mike Tyson

1985

"7-Eleven is the pulse beat of America. I think that Bruce Springsteen should do a song about a 7-Eleven in Asbury Park, New Jersey, but write it in such a way that America's youth can identify and slurp along with the boss. Hail the Boss! Hail 7-Eleven!"

—Henry Rollins, June

"I taught her how to wear fucking lights, man. Let her have a good time. Now maybe they won't look at the color of my panties, and they can concentrate on my singin'." —Pat Benatar, on Madonna, September

1986

"I'm going to make my environment more open, because I want to have more women around me. The marriage I had several years ago [when he married 27 members of his organization at once] has made many African women who want to participate in my art stay away."

—Fela Kuti, July

"Mah family helped start rock'n'roll. But it's

degenerated from those early '50s to what we're seeing today."

—Jimmy Swaggart, October

1987

"In terms of morality, I have no problem with drugs. To me, drugs are like food."

—Jery Garcia, July

1988

"I think if someone becomes hugely successful, the public becomes disgusted with them and begins to wish the star would slip on a banana peel."

—Madonna, February

1989

"I did lose my soul to the devil, but I'm happy to say I was redeemed by Caspar the Friendly Ghost. As a matter of fact, I am Caspar the Friendly Ghost."

—Daniel Johnston, March

"Up until Def Jam came along, hip hop was corny—all break dancing and Jheri Curis."

—Mike D, October

1990

"Just because we didn't write the songs on our album doesn't mean we don't have any talent."

—Donnie Wahlberg, New Kids on the Block, June

1991

"I love women. I like to be around as many as I possibly can."

—Mike Tyson, January

"I want to die in a tragedy... I've got no intention of living out a stupid, boring, unchallenging life. I want to go down in flames."

—G.G. Allin, January

"Muthafuckas criticized us when we did 'Fuck The Police,' but they shut the fuck

up now." —MC Ren, N.W.A., on the L.A. riots, September

"As far as I'm concerned, the church has no right to open up its mouth about sex for these reasons. First of all, none of them have ever had sex. The second reason is that they do have sex."

—Sinéad O'Connor, November

1992

"In America you can say anything about anybody except the government...The Fourth of July is like the 'fuck the police' holiday of America...Paul Revere was running around saying, 'Here come the pigs!' Now to hear a revolutionary song like 'Cop Killer' coming from the cities...they want to shut it down real quick."

—Ice-T, September

1993

"I've tried to keep my feet on the ground—sometimes almost six feet under...One minute I'm operating as a superstar, and the next, I'm shooting up with some guys on the Lower East Side."

—Keith Richards, January

"George Bush said America needs to be more like the Waltons...The Simpsons. Bart said, 'Hey man, we're just like the Waltons....Both families are praying for an end to the depression.'"

—Matt Groening, January

"I much prefer cynics, abusive people. They're funnier, more truthful. Nice guys grow on trees."

—J Mascis, June

1994

"The other night this guy gave me head. I'm not gay, I just wanted to see what it felt like. And, you know, he stunk. I thought, it's gonna be good because he's a guy. He went at it like he was eating corn on the cob or something."

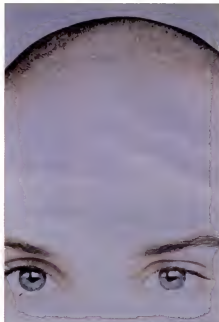
—Perry Farrell, August

1995

"All I have to do is stick my finger up in the air and shit sticks to it."

—Courtney Love, February

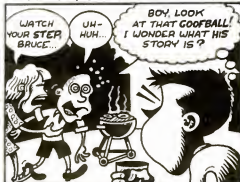
Henry Rollins



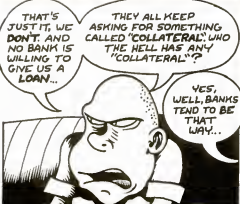
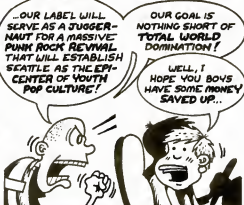
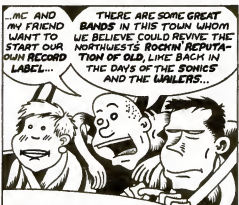
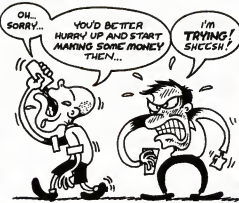
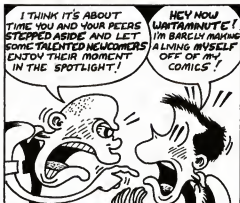
Sinéad O'Connor

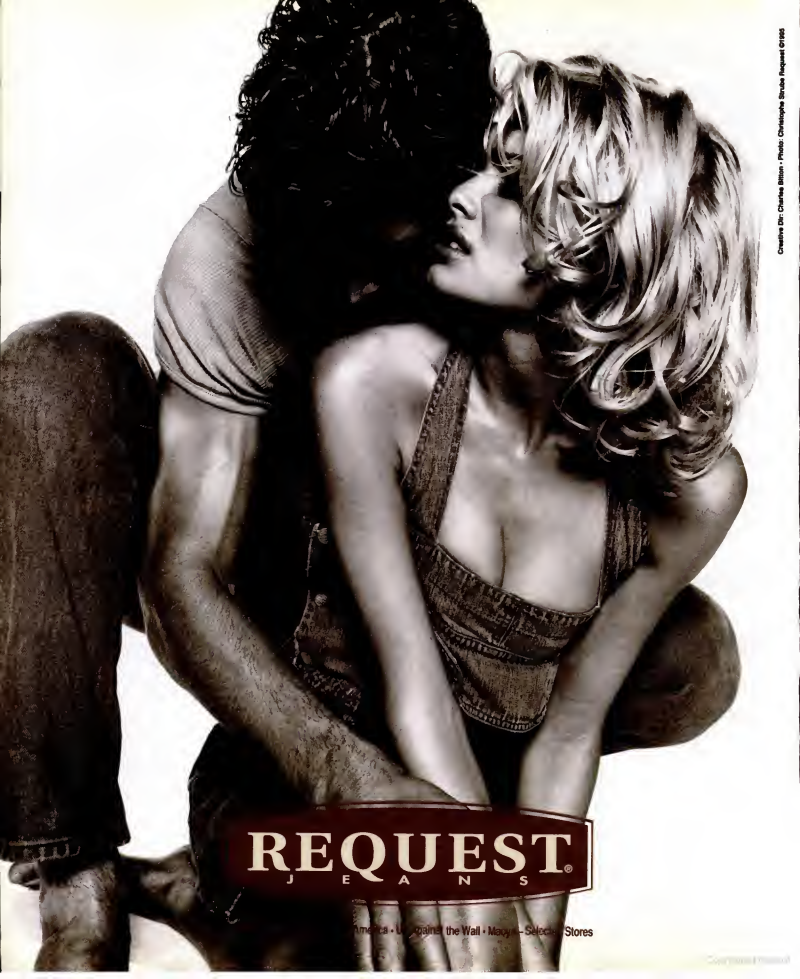


A MAN WITH A VISION!

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PETER BAGGETEN YEARS AGO TODAY (GIVE OR TAKE A YEAR),
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Where Are They Now?

The bigger they climb, the harder they fall. Or so we thought. When tracing some of the names that have appeared in the pages of SPIN over the past decade, we imagined—we hoped—we'd dig up some real hard-luck stories. Gerardo flipping burgers. Happy Mondays living in a box. Dee Snider blocking hats. It was not to be. The list we ultimately compiled turned out to be a tribute to the power of the human survival instinct. But don't worry, we did get some funny Milli Vanilli stories.

JONATHAN BERNSTEIN AND JAY STOWE



Dee Snider

Hey, Dee, what's up? "I'm suffering creatively career-wise because I'm trying to recover from the ugly demise of Twisted Sister." Us too! So what else? "I was pioneering ugly when nobody was doing it." Uh-huh, and...? "I've got a new band, Widowmaker. It's heavy, it's metal, heavier than Twisted, darker than Twisted. As you can see, I've been through hell." Indeed. So what axiom do you live by to get

through this hell? "I live by the axiom: lead, follow, or get the fuck outta the way!" Wow. And what about those screenplays we've been hearing so much about, like *Junk Squad*? "It's kind of a family film." *Helltown*? "It's a horror film. I'm pitching it with me as the psychopath." *In for the Kill*? "It's an action-mystery-thriller kind of thing based in the world of rock'n'roll." *The Amazing Poodini*? "Uh, yeah, it's based on my brother's dog, who he cannot keep locked up." Hmmm. We heard you're on the radio, too. "Dee Snider's Metal Nation out of WRCN on Long Island." Wow. One last question. What do you imagine people say about you now? "He's Dee Snider! He's still the real fuckin' deal! He lives it!"

Stryper

They dressed in yellow-and-black stripes, they hurled Bibles at their audience, they were the only openly Christian heavy metal act to rock the arenas. Stryper! They fought the good fight from 1984's *The Yellow and Black Attack* to 1991's *Can't Stop the Rock*. Unfortunately, the latter title was not prophetic and the rock stopped later that year. Singer Michael Sweet launched a solo career in 1994 with a self-titled album and a single, "Ain't No Safe Way," which promotes abstinence. Was it hard reconciling Christian beliefs with a rock lifestyle? "It's hard just being a Christian," Sweet replies, "but it's worth it."

Emo Philips

Ostrich-like and elliptical, Emo Philips' strange haircut and undulating vocal stylings paralyzed mid-'80s audiences with both fear and laughter. But where so many other standups synergized their acts into sitcom or movies, Emo's profile has been somewhat obscure lately. Currently splitting his time between London and Chicago, Emo, who actually speaks like that, has spanned the globe playing more than 5,000 shows, releasing two



albums, working the talk-show circuit, and headlining myriad cable specials. So Emo, why desert us for England? "The best thing about England is that no one has handguns," he reports. You're actually worried about getting shot onstage in America? "Don't spread it around! Now everyone's gonna try to shoot me." Although his big-screen career didn't progress much further than a part in "Weird Al" Yankovic's *UHF* ("I played the handsome yet Presbyterian shop teacher who gets a bit more than he bargained for when he operates a table saw"), he also executive produced a feature film called *Meet the Parents*. At this time, Emo is feverishly preparing his one-man theater piece, "An Evening With Macaulay Culkin." Does he foresee a huge Emo Philips revival on the horizon? "I don't think I'm really in the Bo Diddley stage of my career yet...But show business is my life. It's my woman."

A-ha

Word is they're in Norway. Let's hope it stays that way.

Sigue Sigue Sputnik

They exploded onto the crazy '80s techno-pop scene with their hideous maquillage, huge stacked heels, terrifying lead singer, and unforgettable debut hit, "Love Missile F1-11." Ten minutes later, they were history. And now? Band mastermind Tony James continues to work his particular magic in other combos too thrilling and numerous to mention. Before joining Sigue Sigue, terrifying lead singer Martin Degville used to run a clothes stand in a market in Birmingham, England. The popular view is that he has returned to his roots.

Tammy Faye and Jim Bakker

Jim is out! After five years behind bars for skimming \$158 million from his Heritage USA flock, Bakker spent the last six months of his sentence under house arrest in Asheville, North Carolina. How's the little woman? Tammy Faye divorced Jim while he was doing hard time and recently tied the knot with lucky Roe Messner, the chief builder of the Heritage USA Christian theme park. Jim's daughter, plucky Tammy Sue, is trying to get dad to join her singing ministry. However, if that gig doesn't pay, it's unlikely Jim will be warbling in the aisles anytime soon. To meet his outstanding legal debts, the locals speculate he's currently running errands for his attorney.

Europe

Europe looked like your average big-haired lite-metal combo. But it hailed from Sweden and it utilized soaring disco synths and thumping backbeats to propel its hit, "The Final Countdown" (remember?), to glory. Sadly, further success eluded Europe and the band rent itself asunder in 1992. Pouty singer Joey Tempest is now a solo artist. The

Sigue Sigue Sputnik





rest of the group is now backing ex-Deep Purple guy Glenn Hughes. Little-known and entirely useless fact: At its height, Europe inhabited the Turks and Caicos Islands to maintain tax-exile status from Sweden.

Pee Wee Herman
Pee Wee's manager, Michael McLean, had this to say: "He has been offered many,

many jobs but has been concentrating on a self-developed project. He has nothing else to say to the public."

Elvira

Elvira, so-called Mistress of the Dark, where is she when you really need her? "Right now, I'm on my way to see Lypsinka," she says, calling from her car phone in L.A. So she's still bounding. But more, much more, than that, she has an album full of her favorite Halloween standards due out on Rhino later this year; she's featured on her own Bally Midway pinball machine; and she's working on moving her legendary all-singing, all-dancing Halloween revue from its home at Knott's Berry Farm to Vegas. But how long can this Elvira shit go on? "When the dress starts looking pathetic, I don't want to still be doing this," she says. "But for the time being, I'm the Sammy Davis, Jr., of the macabre."

Tone Lōc

The gravel-voiced Lōc shot to notoriety when his low-budget riff-rap hit "Wild Thing" shot up the charts and sold 2 million records. Another smash followed with "Funky Cold Medina." His *Lōc-ed After Dark* album went to No. 1. But *Cool Hand Lōc*, his follow-up, peaked many notches below. Now he's aiming his talent toward both big and small screens, following parts in *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* and *Surf Ninjas* with voice-over work as the plant in an upcoming adaptation of "Jack and the Beanstalk." Does he have a message for his few remaining fans? "Tell everyone to keep smokin' the good buds." Okay, Lōc.

Professor Griff

As a member of Public Enemy's toy gun-toting Security of the First World, Griff courted controversy with an anti-Semitic outburst that saw him eventually ousted from the group. He moved to Miami and wound up on Luther Campbell's Luke Records. He is about to unveil an album of poetry with background music titled *Nigga Notes and Quotes of Black World Revolution*. Says Griff: "It's a culmination of reflections from new and upcoming poets." A tour called "Screaming From the Barrel" will follow.

Andrew "Dice" Clay

Strangely, the erstwhile Dickeyman would not return our calls. However, his manager Michael Rotenberg was helpful enough to inform us that the "Dice" is optional. "As an actor, he's Andrew Clay. As a performer, he's 'Dice.'" And, as a performer, does he still sport the same taste in couture? "I don't think he's as much into leather as he used to be," says Rotenberg. Is he still a pig? "He's grown. As everybody grows, so has he."

Milli, we hardly knew ye.

Milli Vanilli

"I was the last knucklehead to deal with them," groaned publicist Wayne Rosso when the name Milli Vanilli came up. Here's a jiggling German duo that almost had it all: the looks, the hits, the tights.

And then the Grammy. Ah yes, the Grammy. After the shock revelation that Rob and Fab's talents did not extend so far as singing on their smash album *Girl You Know It's True*, the backlash was brutal. The Grammy was revoked, the pair was dumped quietly from Arista, and a cheated fan slapped them with a lawsuit, claiming they made her buy their album under false pretenses. "They were two of the dumbest motherfuckers I've ever laid eyes on," recalls Rosso fondly. "Rob was like a bull in a china shop. Fab was the brighter of the two....They're so far out they're on a mall tour with Elvis." A brief attempt to relaunch themselves under the moniker Rob & Fab capsized after someone at their new label absconded with the meager takings from their first and only record. Where are they now? "They're probably pool boys in the L.A. area," chortles Rosso. Says an Arista spokesperson: "Nobody knows anything."

Gerardo

That the term *Rico Suave* is now part of the national lexicon is testament to the enduring appeal of Gerardo. That the term is synonymous with the sort of dumb, buff bandana-sporting studs who populate daytime talk shows is further evidence of his greatness. "He's doing very well in Puerto Rico," says manager Peter Lopez of his client, whose new album *Así Es Justo* came out.

Right Said Fred

"I'm too sexy for my cat, too sexy for my cat, poor pussy...." These brutish British skinheads who looked like they weren't exactly strangers to the concept of rough sex, had the world waiting in time to their smash "I'm Too Sexy." Though its accompanying album *Up* contained some nutty material, no more hits were forthcoming. The subsequent album *Sex and Travel* failed to receive a U.S. release. Currently tolling over an album intended for late spring, the trio plans to embark on its first ever tour. A world tour, no less. "They're still popular?" we enquired of manager Tony Perrin. "They're popular all over the world," he said, emphatically. "But where are they most popular?" After much thought, he replied, "Well...Britain."

Happy Mondays

Madchester's favorite sons are, alas, no more. Singer Shaun Ryder now fronts a group called Black Grape, which has signed to Radioactive Records. Ryder was arrested in Wales at Christmastime for being unpleasant to a local policeman. And now for the good news: Bez lives! The fleet-footed Mondays mascot is currently hanging out, in a social sense, with Black Grape, though he is not part of the band. The Bez legend grows with his recent victory in British rock weekly *NME's* Super Groups Rotisserie League. He trounced all comers in the "Assorted Loonies Who Dance, Rap, Play Keyboards, Pose, and Somehow Manage To Hold Down Jobs As Pop Stars" category. Well done, Bez! ●

Additional reporting by Andy Hawald.





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while gangsta rap dominates
newspaper headlines and record-biz
bottom lines, CHARLES AARON
explores the forgotten history of L.A.'s
other hip hop scene, and in the process
finds hope for the music's future.

California Dreaming

"You know what? Since I smoked crack, a lot of my memory is fucked up. I mean, I remember that all this shit *happened*, but I just can't remember the years." Kicking back in a conference room at Tommy Boy Records in lower Manhattan, Artis "Coolio" Ivey is trying to reminisce about Los Angeles in the mid-'80s, a hip hop era defined by gang violence, drugs, and dippy electric boogaloo beats.

A budding B-boy who collected tapes of New York legends the Cold Crush Brothers and DJ Kool Herc, Coolio had no clique, no real identity. He tried crack to fit in, got hooked, and still felt isolated. "I was the angry MC, I didn't like nobody," he says. He managed to record a 12-inch single called "Whatcha Gonna Do," but hated it. Now, almost a decade later, with a platinum album in his pocket,

Freestyle Fellowship's Mikah Nine blows his own horn.

he should be sitting pretty. But his face, framed by the familiar nimbus of dreary tendents, is well beyond any normal definition of world-weary. The past has definitely waxed Coolio's ass.

Yet, when he daydreams a ride to the beach and pops open the trunk in the video for his version of Lakeside's 1980 funk smash "Fantastic Voyage," Coolio imagines an idealized version of a hip-hop future that washes away all that weariness. The kids of all ages and races who pile out in his Chevy ready to splash to the beat are time travelers, without a clue about the bleak years of L.A.'s hip hop history. And Coolio, for from the rat-et-lat of his Compton home, welcomes them to this funky utopia by rapping, "There ain't no Bloodin' / There ain't no Crippin' / Ain't no punk-ass niggas set trippin'." In fact, Dockweiler State Beach, the site of the video, was a popular spot for pre-gangster rap sound-system parties, according to Michael Mixxin' Moor, an influential DJ who hosted parties there. "It's straight out Imperial Highway, and that's straight out of the ghetto," says Moor. "We'd set up in the sand and people would have picnics." If only it were that easy.

Hip hop, the most misrepresented pop music since Elvis threw rock'n'roll's hip out of joint, has prompted conflicting visions for years—none too surprising since the form's very nature is to appropriate the parts of history that sound best at the moment. But the dimwitted debate on the culture of violence that gangsta rap ceases, glorifies, or reflects has overshadowed many of the genre's most innovative artists, and reduced hip hop's popular image to that of gang members, pimps, or blunt-puffing fools who treat women like disposable lighters. Dr. Dre's languidly brutal soundscapes and Snoop Doggy Dogg's tensely flippancy lyrics have become the boilerplate for pop success (Dre's Death Row certel moved more than ten million units the past two years), further distancing L.A. from New York as hip hop's hub.

There has been, however, little mention of L.A.'s non-gangsta rap history, and how it has produced a music and culture that may determine the sound and identity of hip hop's next generation as surely as Dre and the gangstas have determined this one. If these artists finally have their say, hip hop's future will not mean recasting gangsta rap's unforgetting funk (as many New York writers have tried). It will be about equaling hip hop's original innovative scratch, improvising lyrical and musical styles (with jazz as an inspirational model, not a sample library), and fiercely questioning the gangsta rapper's constant yearning to play the bad man to feel like a real man. Sure, it's just music. And that's just skin covering up our innermost secrets.

The poet Langston Hughes once said in explanation of the blues, "What can purge my heart of sadness but a song of sadness?" Replace "sadness" with "anger" and you'd have the intro of a good argument for gangsta rap. Or if you wanted to step deeper into the existential mire, you could quote Cornel West's observation that gangsta rap is a "nihilistic response to a nihilistic culture." Or you could say that it provides an aureole tour of neighborhoods most of us will never visit. But what has been long forgotten is that N.W.A.'s 1988 album *Straight Outta Compton*, the holy book of studio gangstas, came complete with its own justification. Not only an updated blaxploitation flick with dope beats, the brainchild of Eric "Easy-E" Wright and Andre "Dr. Dre" Young was also a considered response to what they perceived as the hypocritical hip-hop status quo of the late '80s.

In an interview with Brian Cross for his book *It's Not About a Salary: Rep, Race & Resistance in Los Angeles*, Dre explains his motivations. "I wanted to go all the way left. Everybody was trying to do this black power and shit, so I was like, let's give 'em an alternative, nigger, nigger nigger, nigger nigger, fuck this fuck that, bitch bitch bitch bitch, suck my dick, all this kind of shit, you know what I'm saying?" What Dre was saying, in his own inimitably monotonous, music-biz-savvy way, was that Public Enemy never meant shit to him, motherfucker them and KRS-One and X-Clan and anybody else from the East Coast who talked the conscious talk, but tripped trying to walk the walk. So he went back to the hard-rock mid-'80s, when Russell Simmons, would-be entertainment mogul from the buxworthy middle Queens suburbs, hit it big by packaging younger brother Joe and basketball buddy Darryl McDaniels as the supposedly street-tough Run-D.M.C. Dre took Simmons's hardness-equals-reality blueprint and

expertly applied it to the gang culture of L.A.

Straight Outta Compton was Los Angeles throwing down in New York's case and refusing to be dismissed anymore as retarded electrobeat junkies with drippy Jheri curls and mushmouth lyrics. Shamelessly swiping the Bomb Squad's production tricks (compare the claustrophobic buzz of N.W.A.'s debut with *The Chronic's* expansive vista), Dre called out both the conscious rap movement and the birthplace of hip hop. And in retrospect, who can blame him?

Self-righteous contradictions were the rule of the day as the '80s gave way to the '90s. Carlton "Chuck D" Ridenhour's dedication to his childhood friendship with Richard "Professor Griff" Griffin led to clumsy endorsements and denunciations of Nation of Islam hate rhetoric. Boogie Down Productions' Kris "KRS-One" Parker, self-billed as "the Teacher," went on speaking tours, ridiculed the educational system, discouraged high school kids from attending college, and never provided a viable alternative. At a 1991 Newark, New Jersey, youth conference called Unity Jam, KRS compared black college students to "house niggers," and stated that "Your degree is not going to get you a job, you get jobs through family and friends." A young voice from the crowd asked sarcastically, "You gonna be my friend?"

Of course, most rappers could give two grunts about these problems. But as the '80s closed down, there was strong sentiment that hip hop was too full of itself, that it wasn't fun anymore. Gangsta rappers and producers capitalized, delivering a voyeur's wet dream of violent sex and sexy violence in a plainspoken drawl more inviting than New York's intricately accented rhymes. Gangsta rap's severe posing was peep-friendly, and MTV gave kids from South Dakota to the South Bronx a view. The genre also fed a deep-seated distrust of any popular art that advertised its capacity to change lives without providing an exact dollar amount. What resulted was a tiresome cycle of not-so-cheap thrills, police boycotts, legislative hand-wringing, and a boom! soundtrack of self-negation that put as much money in white hands as in black.

Make no mistake, gangsta rap didn't beget gangsterism in L.A. in

Gangsta rap fed a deep-seated distrust of any popular art that advertised its capacity to change lives without providing an exact dollar amount.

the early '70s, after much of the local industry quit town and the Black Panther Party was devastated by the FBI's COINTELPRO program and the LAPD's Public Disorder Intelligence Division, the Crips and later the Bloods endowed the street life with an empowering appeal. Still, gang bangers didn't form record companies, make videos or market themselves. They just rolled up at parties, posed, hassled folks, the usual. Around 1983, they posed hardest at parties thrown by Uncle Jam's Army (named in tribute to Funkadelic), an organization put together by promoter Roger Clayton, Michael Mixxin' Moor, and others. Uncle Jam's gave local DJs such as Egyptian Lover, Bobcat, Bettiecat (now Domino's producer), and a teenage Dr. Dre their first taste of celebrity. New York rappers Kurtis Blow, Doug E. Fresh and Run-D.M.C. stopped by, and Uncle Jam's eventually filled the L.A. Sports Arena with almost 10,000 kids.

Shut down in 1986 due to gang violence, Uncle Jam's paved the way for the business of gangsta rap. And after the radio station KDAY decided to program some rap hits, give local artists airplay, and promote parties, a support system was in place (KDAY became the country's first all-rap station in the late '80s, before being sold in 1991). The gangsta rap sound, however, was still playing catch-up. Early L.A. hip hop often cut straight to the paper chase. Embarrassing "Planet Rock" knock-offs were omnipresent, bumpin' countless car systems. But for some young L.A. hip-hop fans, Uncle Jam's was not the only party in town.

"We hated that shit. We were like 'Fuck the Egyptian Lover,'" says Killu Beckwith, DJ for Freestyle Fellowship, a key group in L.A.'s non-gangsta



Past, present, and future, clockwise from left: Breakdancin' at Radio, 1983; Artis "Coolio" Ivey; Ahmad Lewis; Michael Mixxin' Moor.

past and future. Beckwith was introduced to hip hop in elementary school by his uncle, a member of the break-dancing crew Shake City Rockers, the first L.A. chapter of Afrika Bambaataa's Zulu Nation. "We'd go to those parties and sit outside, wearing Kangols, Lees, Pumas with fat faces. People thought we were crazy, but we felt good being outcasts. True hip hop has always been underground in L.A. There's always been the gangsters, which was Uncle Jam's. Not that gangsters were throwing the parties, but that's who it attracted and that's why you didn't go there."

Instead, Beckwith got his hip-hop education at the Radio, a club in a downtown warehouse that went from 11:00 to 5:00 in the morning. This was home for L.A.'s original non-gangster, kids who obsessed over the latest New York battle tape, embracing every aspect of hip hop, not just those that were marketable.

"The Radio was all B-boys [kids who were down with break dancing and graffiti, as well as the music]. It was an entire culture and not many kids in the black community get to realize a culture unless it's some gang-related shit. They don't see anything but the block and the end of the block and they don't get taught their history. Bambaataa and those Puerto Rican kids were creating a whole hip hop culture in the parks. That's what I latched on to."

But after the success of the 1984 dancepointillism flick *Breakin'* (featuring Tracy "Ice-T" Marrow, a Radio regular), the trends and gangsters overran the club, squeezing out Beckwith and the B-boys. For hip-hop kids who weren't after a piece of the rock—cash or crackwise—the underground went practically subterranean. For years.

Then came the Good Life. Or more specifically, Hip Hop Night at the Good Life Health Food Centre in a South Central strip mall. Conceived in 1989, Hip Hop Night invoked the phrase "conscious rap" and banned cursing onstage. But it was hardly a goody-goody handholding session for disenfranchised B-boys. "I was blown away that there were all these people like me, you know, outcasts who were into hip hop, not just the business bullshit of rap," says Beckwith. "These kids were freestyling [improvisational rhyming], busting triple-syllable words and making sense. I was like, 'Damn, these motherfuckers are some of the best ever.'"

Freestyle Fellowship formed around a core group of MCs—Edwin "Aceyalone" Hayes, Michael "Mikah Nine" Troy, and Ornette "Self Jupiter" Glenn—and the jazz-funk band Underground Railroad (Beckwith

and Mtulazaj) "Peace" Davis were included on the 1993 Island debut *Innercity Griots*. The quintessential representatives of the Good Life, Freestyle spoke with an amazing mélange of voices—strident, distressed, enigmatic, outrageously playful—and proved, at the very least, that South Central wasn't a gangsta monolith. "It's not that gangsta rap was necessarily wack and not welcome, because gangstas came in there and rapped," explains Beckwith. "It's that Good Life MCs were against all the simplicity, saying the first thing that comes to mind, rhyming 'bigger' with 'figure' with 'nigger,' you know, the same old shit. Our whole vibe was, 'We're not down with the same old shit.'"

Parallel to the Good Life's hip-hop consciousness-raising, Uncle Jam's vet Michael Mixxin' Moor was undergoing a transformation. After translating New York's radio mix show concept for L.A. at KJLH (the Stevie Wonder-owned R&B station), Moor shifted into A&R before quitting to do studio work (with artists from Chaka Khan to Boy George. But by the late '80s, he was adrift.

"I was a dead negro, dead in the mind," says Moor, a burly man who suffers from a serious knee injury that ended his football career at the University of California at Berkeley in the late '70s. "Then I got the teachings of Islam from a brother who'd been through the prison system and it touched me." Moor returned to KJLH in 1990, but when he opened his first dance-mix show, he decided to take a more personal stance. "I opened up with a speech by [Louis] Farrakhan. Where most people used a sound bite of Bunsy Bunny or Clint Eastwood, I used Farrakhan saying, 'I am black, like Solomon before me, come all ye faithful.' It was a black pride thing. Then I got a little more aggressive, putting other bites in, not necessarily religious, like, 'The U.S. government are a bunch of rascals.' I boosted up the rap, and next thing you know, the program director comes to me and says, 'Look, KDAY's off the air, you're the only representative of the hip hop community we have. Will you do a rap show?'"

Lite ICE PICKS

Various Artists *Dangerous Inventions* (Futurist)

This good-looking piece of plastic doubles as a sampler of 12 unsigned bands that really soars in every fashion. Uncommon to most discs of this nature, the skewered songs featured here share a musical frame of mind—thanks to the blanket production of 700 miles' Louis Scialese.

Sense Field *Sense Field* (Revelation)

What else can be said? This album is rockin' stuff with more pop overtones than scooby-snacks in a 1978 Saturday morn siting. Sense Field put this disc together from their two previous DIY releases, and a couple of unreleased songs to boot. "Nova" and "Idely" stand as favorites on the menu.

Poster Children *Junior Citizen* (Sire/Reprise)

Propelled by bassist Rose Marshack's speed-chicken head-bobbing, a Poster Children live show is a relentless, high-energy stream of dense, melodic fuzz. *Junior Citizen*, their fourth album, captures the essence of the stage show without the risk of whiplash.

Elastica *Slutter* (DGC)

This female-led gang of four is the coolest thing in Brit pop right now and deservedly so. *Slutter* delivers four brilliant pop songs about sex, your mates, and "Rocknroll" with that charming British cockiness. It's an ever accelerating guitar romp that ends in girlish giggles. Elastica is one new wave of New Wave band worthy of the hype.



Creating instrumental beds for more sound bites (from CNN, PBS, local newscasts), interspersing songs by Public Enemy, Brand Nubian, and Main Source, Moor upped the speech quotient—not only Farrakhan, but Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.—and dubbed the show the "Militant Mastermix." "L.A. didn't have a leader to galvanize the hip-hop scene or spearhead a movement, and when N.W.A came out, they were it, and I was like, 'I'm not down with this bullshit,' black kids killing black kids."

All in the midst of a saameess, broodingly funky mix, Moor's show gripped L.A.'s black youth with its virulent attacks on the government, the LAPD, and "white devils." But it was way more than KJLH bargained for. "Station management started saying I was letting profani-

ties out over the air, which I wasn't," says Moor. "I was bleeping everything. I was very sensitive to the FCC. But one night I played the Last Poets' 'Nigges Are Scared of Revolution' three times, and everybody went off. I didn't realize that the word 'nigger' was gonna offend all these bourgeois blacks."

Moor was canned in the summer of '91, but the show was quickly picked up by local NPR affiliate KCRW. His stay at L.A.'s voice of feel-good liberalism was tempestuous to say the least. "They rolled out the red carpet at first," says Moor. "They gave me a ton of publicity, I was in the *L.A. Times Magazine*, and then they had this thing called Summer Fest, a \$45-a-person wine-and-cheese tasting, and they had all the DJs set up and do about 30 minutes of their programs. I had a speech of Khelid Muhammad (a black separatist and mentor to Professor Griff and O'Shea "Ice Cube" Jackson) saying, 'Why do you make us get down on our hands and knees and don't make the white people in Bel Air get down on their hands and knees?' I remember [station manager] Ruth Hirschman coming over and saying, 'Could you please turn it down a little bit?' Apparently I was alienating some sponsors."

Moor knew his days were numbered, and after the Rodney King verdict and the ensuing riots, his show got dicier. The voices of other speakers, and even the music, was gradually phased out in favor of more Farrakhan and Khalid Muhammad. He began deferring to the Nation of Islam party line. The last Militant Mastermix at KCRW (in Merch of '94) featured a Farrakhan speech in its entirety, with Moor mixing instrumentals as a backdrop. After receiving a threatening letter from the Anti-Defamation League, a nationalist Jewish organi-

zation which regularly snoops on civil rights groups, KCRW bailed on the Mastermix, never specifying exactly why. Moor felt betrayed. But he also betrayed his show with an increasingly reductionist approach.

When I visited Moor's home in L.A.'s Hancock Park, a middle-class neighborhood where he was raised by a white mother and a black father, he chatted enthusiastically for almost three hours. Unfortunately, at least two of those hours were spent on impassioned Farrakhan-like ramblings about how whites were the degenerated, barbaric result of a genetic experiment on the original black man by the scientist Yacub (heard in, and how this related to the Masons, the movie 2001: A Space Odyssey, and why records spin at 33 1/3 RPMs (news to me). Then there were the conspiracy theories that even Oliver

Asking if Ice Cube (like PE and KRS before him) believed the hype and was too full of himself was like asking if Fat Joe Da Gangsta eats wherever he wants.

Stone wouldn't buy—bar codes, Jews, bio-chips, Jews, UFOs, and satellites filled with 40 pounds of plutonium heading for Jupiter to blind the Muslim chosen on the last day of 1999. And this was before we got to the Kennedy assassination video. I knew I was in way over my head when Moor began a sentence, "Now, getting back to Moses..."

Throughout the time I was with Moor, he awkwardly emphasized that he didn't mean me when he referred to "white devils." But more worrisome were his bitterness (toward Dr. Dre, who he called "ignorant" and "oblivious") and his egoism (referring to himself as the "Godfather" of L.A. hip hop). As with many young rappers, he seemed most interested in Islamic teachings that proclaimed him as god of his own universe and assigned specific blame for historical wrongs. Unable to cash in like Dre or stay true to the underground like Beckwith, Moor played both sides. Rather than explore his own powerful voice, he exploited hip hop's. Michael Mixin' Moor is currently off the air in Los Angeles.

As the L.A. "Riots" (or "Rebellion," depending on which end of the violence you found yourself) gave gangsta rappers the aura of prophets presaging racial apocalypse, a familiar cycle went into motion. Asking if Ice Cube (like PE and KRS before him) believed the hype and was too full of himself was like asking if Fat Joe Da Gangsta eats wherever he wants. As the hypocrisy and obsessive play-acting became absurdly evident—Hammer's last album, Tupac's career—gangsta rap was reacting to nothing but its own mythology.

"N.W.A came out yelling and it got everybody's attention, and people kept wanting more," says 19-year-old Ahmed Lewis, whose "Back in the



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THIS FISH IS IN.

HE'S ALWAYS IN.

IF HE GOES OUT,

HE'LL DIE.

YOU, HOWEVER,

HAVE NO EXCUSE.

ICE BREWED FOR THE TASTE THAT GOES ALL OUT WHEN YOU'RE OUT. THE NIGHT IS YOUNG



right - start

"I think people associate happiness with nothingness and seriousness with deepness," says the Pharcyde's Imani.

Day" was a hit in the summer of '94. "Then it got carried away, people didn't understand the situations they were talking about...it wasn't real anymore. There's nothing real about saying you're gonna put 30 slugs in somebody's chest or that you dwell in hell and all this ridiculous stuff that isn't even hip hop. Instead of being musical and coming out with a point of view, it's just 'Boom boom boom.'"

Lewis, also a product of the Good Life scene, grew up in South Central near the intersection of Florence and Normandie, where truck driver Reginald Denny was beaten by rioters. Lewis believes the events of April 29, 1992, gave gangsta rap a second life. "It most definitely didn't hurt sales. The whole thing was so unfortunate, a lot of steps backward were taken. But from where we were standing, at 76th and Vermont, a travesty had been committed by letting the officers off and we weren't going to stand for it. The media made it seem so bad, 'Oh, it's terrible.' But in the 'hood, everything was good. The gang truce sparked up, everybody had one common enemy—the police. People were coming up with meat from the grocery stores, from the looting, and everybody's power got turned off, so the meat was going bad and we were having barbecues. It was like suspended time, and for some people, I guess, the gangsta rappers gave that perspective."

But gangsta rap also consistently betrayed the complexity of L.A.'s black youth. For instance, though Lewis came of age in South Central, he was bused 45 minutes away to the mostly white, affluent community of Pacific Palisades to attend high school, where he was class president and captain of the football team. There he met Kendal Gorty, Motown boss Berry's son, who produced his debut album. "I was weird, you know, like bussing is supposed to create integration, but when all the black kids got bussed in, all the white kids started going to private school, so it turned out to be a mostly black and Hispanic school. It was so funny."

Lewis's brother Masekela, a rapper who fell into gang banging, vigilantly shielded his brother from the same fate. As a result, Ahmad understands and opposes the gang mentality. "I was never into that life, but it's not like I don't hang around with my friends who choose to do it. They're growing like I'm growing...Obviously, hip hop is a reflection of what happens in society; society is not a reflection of what happens in hip hop. But people are weak-split, and if you make a hip-hop record and say, 'Listen to my record, but don't do what I say,' that's a cop-out. When we start to say the cop-out isn't good enough, then things will change...Everybody focuses on gangsta rap, but there's a whole community of hip hoppers who are tired of the whole thing..."

The Pharcyde, for instance, whose four members are products of environments—South Central, Compton, Fairfax, Pasadena—that defy shorthand analysis. After years of haunting trendy clubs, hoofing it in music videos, teaching Hip Hop 101 at dance studios, touring Japan with a prefab pop star named Hiroko, and chillin' with Toni "Oh, Mickey You're So Fine" Basil ("Yo she's an O.G., on the real, she's a 'G' from way back"), they finally seem at home as scruffy artists here in their creatively unfurnished crib tucked into



Above, Freestyle Fellowship, from left: Peace, Killa, Aceyalone, Satesonic's Daddy-O, and Mikah Nine. Left, the Roots, from left: Scott Storch, Rahzel, Amir Thompson, Tariq Trotter, and Leonard Hubbard.



the comfy neighborhood of Los Feliz, just east of Hollywood. Derrick's in a back bedroom that doubles as a studio, sorting out beats and rhymes for the group's second album, *Revelations*. Romye, shirtless, smiles brightly through a shield of gold caps while Imani, dressed in khakis and a checked button-down, rolls a spliff, and leans against a waist-high mirror that spans an entire wall of the living room.

Like De La Soul in the late '80s, the Pharcyde's brilliantly fidgety abilities should allow them to get over commercially without faking it like real tough nuts or rough suits. But *Bizarre Ride II*, despite gleefully exploring phony personas like a hip-hop case study, was patronized as a clever trifle because the group smiled more than they frowned and dared bust a bunch of mother jokes on the first single. Why did so many folks (including me, who carelessly wrote a mixed review) whiff on the substance?

"I don't know, dude," says Imani, shaking his head and glancing out a window. "I think people associate happiness with nothingness and seriousness with deepness. A lot of people, they'll just be self-proclaimed prophets, kickin' that bullshit. And I'm not trying to proclaim myself as anything. I just talk in my twisted slang, and all I can say is, there are a lot of fools who ain't me."

Do you think the album had a message that people missed? He grins slyly as he lights up. "That album is drenched in subliminal messages, a lot of racial undertones, whether you wanna face it or not. The world is so racial, dude, no matter how you look at it. We've been all over and this place [L.A.] is just superracial, believe that."

"Let me tell you a story." Imani stands up and waves a finger in my direction. "We're driving through Beverly Hills in a shiny new 1994 Volvo, I have dreadlocks, he [Romye] has a 'fro and gold teeth, we got the sunroof back, everything's cool. We were just rollin' too nice, dude. So this police lady pulls us over and we asked her what's the problem. And get this, she says, 'Wouldn't you have pulled her over?' I was like, 'Damn, you've got to be bold to say some shit like that.' I mean, she's looking at me like I'm Mr. Mandingo and I'm just heading over to the Beverly Center to pick me up a nice little Polo shirt." Imani leans back against the mirror and inhales deeply. "And they had big guns, you know, so they got me terrified. 'I'll speak my mind, but shit, the police out here are wicked. So she looks me straight in the eye and says, 'What gang are you from?' And I was like, 'What are you talkin' about.' And then she looked at my tattoos and went, 'Well, what are those?' And I said, 'That's my name, and that's a crest I thought up.' Then she says, 'You thought it up?' I just stared back and said, 'Yeah, I think a lot.'"

Which is the kind of thing that gets you in a lot of trouble in this country. And is another reminder that for many young black men and women,

(continued on page 215)

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FOR THE LAST HOUR, MARIA BEATTY HAS BEEN TIED TO A chair with her stockings and gagged with her own lace panties. Now she's annoyed.

Beatty is directing a segment from her new movie, *The Black Glove*, in the elegant living room of her New York City apartment, and her cameraman is ruining the shot. Clearly, her muffled grumbling and impatient head-nodding indicate that she wants him to stand *behind* her in this scene, but he doesn't seem to get it.

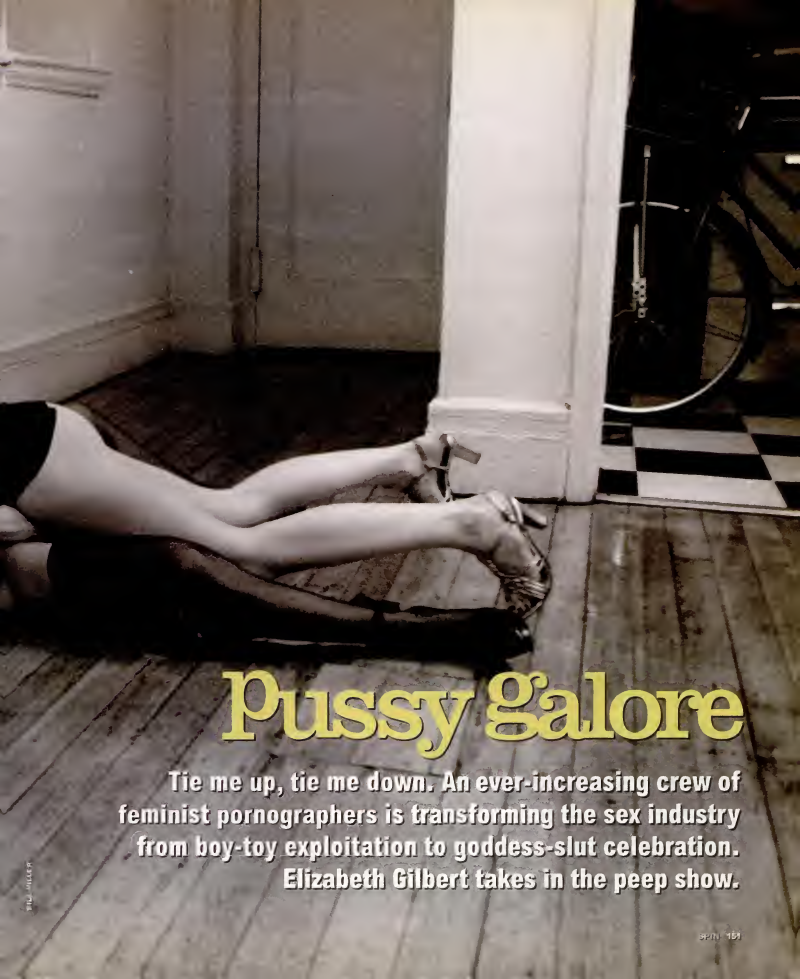
I've seen Beatty act before, in a movie called *A Lot of Fun for the Evil One*. If you've ever really been in love, then that particular film might feel profoundly familiar to you, too. It's a Cinderella story: Girl meets dominatrix, dominatrix hangs girl from ceiling, whips her, fucks her with a billy club, urinates on her, and makes her suck motorcycle boots. Beatty plays the girl.

Evil One's co-director, a woman named Mary Magdalene Serra, tells me that the movie is intended to be "a masturbatory nightmare."

It could also be a bit of a political nightmare, since Serra defines herself, and her work, as thoroughly feminist. Considering the degradation to which her leading lady submits, this may seem contradictory. But it makes everyone curious.

That's why I'm watching Beatty direct herself getting spanked by Goddess Rosemary, her dominatrix girlfriend. Her apartment is white, her floor is bare, her furniture simple. On one wall, a large mirror hangs, its frame

*On the set of The Black Glove:
Goddess Rosemary (top) and Maria Beatty.*



Pussy Galore

Tie me up, tie me down. An ever-increasing crew of feminist pornographers is transforming the sex industry from boy-toy exploitation to goddess-slut celebration. Elizabeth Gilbert takes in the peep show.

surrounded by gaping bloodshot papier-mâché eyeballs. The cameraman, a chubby, nervous, middle-aged transvestite, is completely intimidated by his subjects. Betty, a pretty, dimpled blonde, is dressed in garters and a push-up bra. Rosemary, a slim, black-haired woman with skin as pale as skim milk, is gorgeous in a purple silk gown and gold high heels. I myself am dressed like a sales person at the Gap.

This is a small movie filmed in a small space, and I'm trying to stay out of the way. I keep moving to different corners of the room, but everywhere I go, I accidentally sit on sex toys. First a lavender dildo, then a vibrating egg, then a small leather whip. I finally put myself on the very edge of a couch, and sit still.

The cameraman gently tilts Betty backwards, until both she and the chair to which she is bound are lying face-up on the floor. She can't move or speak, but he keeps coming to her for technical direction, anyway. "Should Rosemary enter from the hallway or the bathroom?" the cameraman asks.

"Umph-mmph," Betty commands through her gag.

"And then what?" he asks anxiously.

Pornography was created by men, for men. It's often about girls, but it's not for girls. For instance, I recently watched a lousy movie called *Anel Spitfire* in a stinking Times Square theater with my friend Amy. We both wore baseball hats so nobody could ejaculate in our hair.

I asked the ticket guy, "Do you get a lot of women here?"

He said, "Who?"

Until now, the most notable female porn director was Doris Wishman, who was making softcore exploitative trash as far back as the Eisenhower administration. She produced such cult classics as *Bed Girls Go To Hell*, *Nude on the Moon*, and *Deadly Weapons* (in which the star, Chesty Morgan, smothered mobsters to death with her massive boobs). Today, Wishman is in her 70s and lives in Florida. I call her to see what she thinks of all these whippersnapper feminist pornographers. She hangs up on me. But not before saying, "I know nothing about pornography."

Sex goddess: Annie Sprinkle's calling card.



It's difficult to refute this. One ex-porn star tells me, "Doris was the worst! She had no sensibility about sex. I never understood why this little old lady was making dirty movies."

Actually, she was making them for cash. There was no other reason to do it. That was back when pornography was still a boys-only treehouse. That was in the era of actress Linda Lovelace, whose sleazeball husband reputedly forced her at gunpoint to star in *Deep Throat*, the most famously exploitative movie of all time. That was back when all good feminists fought the sex industry. Today, there are a lot of women in the flicks-for-chicks business.

Dr. Betty Dodson, for example, teaches a roomful of women how to masturbate in *Selfloving*. Ex-stripper Fanny Fatale uses anatomy charts to teach a splashy orgasm in *How To Female Ejaculate*. Ex-porn star Candida Royalle explores a family's fantasies in *Three Daughters*. Ex-prostitute Annie Sprinkle challenges your repressions in *The Sluts and Goddesses Video Workshop*. Doris Kloster sets the erotic documentary *Temptation* in a reel New York City dungeon, where in a typical scene, a beautiful young woman uses a man kneeling beside her as an ashtray.

Sex-positive feminism has reached the mainstream press as well. Sallie Tisdale's erotic study, *Talk Dirty to Me: An Intimate Philosophy of Sex*, intellectually celebrates some very nasty little habits, and it's selling like magic. Nadine Strossen, the American Civil Liberties Union's first female president, just published a thoughtful book called *Defending Pornography*. Appearing at your local newsstand are popular magazines such as *On Our Backs* (lesbian erotica), and *Dominant Mystique* (which contains a sex-line number inviting callers to "bark like the dog you are").

This is a different planet from the one it was 12 years ago. Back then, feminists Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin led a popular fight to crack down on the sex industry on the grounds that pornography caused rape, and thus violated women's civil rights. Unfortunately, in trying to stay out of pornographer's beds, MacKinnon and Dworkin ended up making kiddy-face with the censorship-happy religious right, which isn't sexy at all, and which alienated thousands of women who feel better about modifying porn rather than abolishing it altogether.

As feminist psychotherapist Deborah Luepnitz says, "When I mention feminist pornography to women, their eyes light up. It makes us somehow believe that we can have our politics and eat it, too."

Back on the set of *The Black Glove*, Maria Beatty, finally ungagged, asks if I wouldn't mind taking some still photos of the filming with her personal camera. It's the kind of small, automatic camera you often see around the necks of visitors to Mount Rushmore. I'm happy to do it, but I don't feel much like a pornographer. I feel like a tourist.

This is what I get: Rosemary stuffing a dildo into Beatty's mouth, and then sitting on it and riding it. This looks particularly torturous to me because I have a bad head cold, and can only breathe through my mouth. I say a silent prayer for Beatty's sinuses, then shoot a whole roll of film.

"Traditional pornography looks mechanized and formulaic because it is," erotic director Candida Royalle tells me. "They'll set up the lights and cameras for fellatio, and film that for a while. Then everyone takes a break while they set up the lights and cameras for another position, then they film that. And so on. Later, they'll string it together in editing."

Royalle knows. She was writing in front of the smut cameras back in the '70s, when other women were trying to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. Since then, she has transformed herself from a cute brunette sex kitten to a smooth blond businesswoman who may well eat like she's in her 40s but certainly doesn't look it.

Royalle stopped acting in 1980, frustrated with the sex-negative roles available to her and other women. It was in therapy that she decided to produce her own erotic films for women and couples.

Granted, that couldn't have seemed too difficult in a business glutted with



In ecstasy: Candida Royalle wins yet another Adult Video Award.

films such as *Gang Bang Girl 5* and *Pump Her in the Dumper*. "I use real-life lovers as often as I can," she explains. "I give them some basic instructions, and then leave the cameras rolling. We never, never interrupt the lovemaking. Actors tell me they've never been directed so wonderfully. And the story is always about a woman's pleasure."

Feminist porn may seem like a fringe movement, but Royalle is successful enough to need a Broadway office, a distributor, a bookkeeper, and several assistants. God help us, Royalle's porn doesn't look like something Michael Douglas might do in an R-rated movie, but it is soft. The subversive part comes from the fact that she's changing how we make love. She gets fan mail every day from grateful American housewives who are finally having hot nooky because of her movies.

More outrageous is director Annie Sprinkle, 40, who's been in the sex business for two decades, as a star of 200 movies and as a prostitute. "I've always prided myself in being at the forefront," explains Sprinkle.

In her masterpiece, *The Sluts and Goddesses Video Workshop: Or How To Be a Sex Goddess in 101 Easy Steps*, Sprinkle plays the jolly instructor, guiding women into freeing their inner sluts. She seems charming and wide-eyed, with a red beehive hairdo, huge breasts, and a funny little crooked-toothed smile. In later scenes, she appears with two friends and a tremendous vibrator, indulging herself in an operatic five-minute orgasm.

Cultural critic Camille Paglia says, "Annie is an Alice in Wonderland, with a delightful comedic manner."

But Sprinkle isn't always appreciated for her goofball presentation. S/M director Mary Magdalene Serra says, "Historically, woman could only be sexual if they were also funny. Mae West could talk about sex because she was funny. Annie Sprinkle can talk about sex because she's funny. But I think such humor dilutes impact."

I'm not sure how much impact Sprinkle has lost. She's still the only woman around who could make charming a line like, "If you're having trouble finding your G-spot, try getting fist-fucked! That way, you can't miss it!"

But Maria Beatty and Goddess Rosemary think that Annie Sprinkle is boring.

Erotic filmmaker end Bard College professor Peggy Ahwesh explains, "There's a big split right now between the old-style goddess feminists and the younger S/M dominatrices. Most porn for women is so soft I can hardly bear it. A lot of us prefer something kinkier, weirder, more formally outrageous."

She might have been thinking of *The Elegant Spanking*, another

Beatty/Delain production, in which Beatty drinks huge amounts of Rosemary's fresh urine. "It's a love story," Beatty tells me. "It's a day in the life."

"I want to meet the person who doesn't pee," Rosemary says defensively. "I want to meet the person who never looked at their pee, or played with pee." Fair enough. Still, I knew a guy who tried to drink his urine once when he was five years old, just to see what it tasted like. "Thirty years later," he told me, "and I still have the taste of piss in my mouth."

It may not become a national pastime, but Goddess Rosemary thinks she's starting a trend. "Madonna copes from me all the time," she offers as an example. "You just wait—in two months, she'll be drinking pee."

"Rosemary, you wouldn't let me drink Madonna's pee, would you?" Beatty asks.

"You can both drink my pee," Rosemary says. "Madonna can lick what drips off your face."

And, yes, there's always something new to try. When I first show up on the set of *The Black Glove*, I ask Beatty politely how she is doing.

"I got my period today," she tells me.

"I'm sorry," I say.

"No," she corrects me. "It's perfect, actually, for what we're filming."

Sure enough, in one scene Goddess Rosemary cuts Beatty loose from the chair, then makas Beatty reech into her own vagine and pull out her dangling tampon, which rests on the floor beside them while they have sex with the lavender dildo.

They stop the action only once, when Rosemary cells an abrupt cut. "Stop taking pictures of my butt," she snaps at me, suddenly mad. "I'm much prettier up here."

So, how exactly does S/M filmmaking benefit women? One answer is that it shakes awake a slumbering sexual consciousness. Perhaps after so many years of enforced silence, any woman who expresses her honest erotic cravings frees up the rest of us to do the same. The alternative answer is that S/M pornography only reinforces the sexual inequalities that women in this society have always been stuck with, no matter who is directing.

"I'm not a victim," S/M director Mary Magdalene Serra says. "I own the lease to my apartment. I pay my own bills. I express myself as I choose. That's what makes me a feminist."

Beatty's choices are harder to swallow, since she allows herself to be forcibly mastated, not only in films but in life. She makes a good living allowing male customers to dominate her. "It's my art," Beatty explains. "And a lot of women have trouble with that, because I'm a professional submissive."

This is probably because a lot of women in this society submit on a purely amateur level. And a lot of other women are trying really hard to break them of the habit. The difference,

Beatty claims, is that she controls her own submission. She's not married to it. She argues that we should all have the right to occasionally surrender to a mean partner with a whip. Maybe not every woman wants to hold hands in soft lighting, or watch a safe Candida Royalle movie.

Eve's Garden, an erotic bookstore in New York City, has been in the business of pleasing women since 1974. Owner Dal Williams tells me, "I used to stay away from S/M products, because I saw the master-slave relationships as too avocative of the male-female relationships. But now that lesbians have gotten into it, I've begun to think I may have been too judgmental."

Sprinkle is not so diplomatic. She remembers Beatty as "the cute little video geek" who co-directed *Sluts and Goddesses*, before getting into S/M. Now she speaks of Beatty as someone lost behind many films. "We had a falling out in the middle of a project, because of different aesthetics. It's sad. I won't go into it. But what do I think of S/M? Boring. Been there, done that."

She pauses, then adds disdaintfully, "And, frankly, I have no patience anymore with beginners."

[\(continued on page 216\)](#)



Swingin' on the Flippity Flop
with Sub Pop...or how two cob
nobblers from Seattle parlayed
a \$20,000 investment
into a \$20 million windfall, and
revolutionized rock'n'roll to boot.
Mike Rubin charts the rise
and fall and rise of Sub Pop Records.

It's 9:30 in the morning, and—surprise!—all across Seattle the coffee is brewing. The sun has barely risen over America's newest rock capital, and I'm already late for my appointment with Sub Pop Records copresident Jonathan Poneman. Cranes are whirring outside the 11th-story windows of the label's downtown offices, in the Terminal Sales Building, across from which a new set of waterfront condo towers that will overlook Puget Sound are under construction, but that's the only activity in sight.

After a few minutes of my nosing around, Sub Pop product manager Dave Rosencrans appears, explaining that Poneman would like me to join him in

the office's conference room. Great, I think, here's my chance to witness real business being transacted—the hammering-out of the final details of the label's impending multimillion-dollar deal with Warner Music, or the fateful moment when another young band of noisemakers signs the dotted line. Rosencrans leads me to the conference room, throws open the doors, and there, underneath a large, rustic oil painting of grazing moose is Poneman...face down on a table, half-naked under a towel, receiving a massage from a plump, moon-faced woman with a goddess figure amulet hanging from her neck. "Buy low, sell high," he offers as a greeting, his voice muffled by a pillow. "I want you to think about whether Gerard Cosloy or Corey Rusk would let you witness this."

No, it's indeed unlikely that the honchos behind either Matador or Touch and Go would allow themselves to be seen played upon a table in the middle of their offices, getting an expensive rubdown. Too conspicuous, too embarrassing, too, well, corporate. But that's exactly the kind of old-school business image for which Poneman, 35, and his partner Bruce Pavitt, 36, have sarcastically striven since they scraped \$20,000 together and started up Sub Pop on April 1, 1988. With one eye on the bottom line and one tongue firmly in cheek, they've merged savvy self-promotion with shameless hucksterism, and it's paid off even better than teenage angst.

Having had the good sense and great ears to release the early recordings of bands such as Soundgarden, Green River (two of whose members are now in Pearl Jam), Nirvana, and Mudhoney, to name a few, Poneman and Pavitt exploited—their term—Seattle's homegrown musical community and helped to develop it into a national and worldwide phenomenon. Though Sub Pop might not have coined the term, it helped make "grunge" a household detergent, and while a dozen of the label's discoveries left the fold for other labels and enjoyed their greatest success elsewhere, Sub Pop's foresight helped to shape the course of music history over the last five years. With visions of Marshall stacks dancing in their heads, Pavitt and Poneman jump-started a geographically based musical happening that has proven to be a cash cow worthy of religious worship: the seven best-selling Seattle bands in 1994 provided their major labels with over \$200 million in gross revenue.

Sub Pop's faux Fortune 500 Identity has long been the label's running joke, from the suits and ties "Supervisory Chairman of Executive Management" Pavitt and "Executive Chairman of Supervisory Management" Poneman wore in their photos inside the landmark 1988 *Sub Pop 200* compilation, to the "limited edition of 500,000" label sampler, *The Grunge Years*, that pictured on its cover two pinstriped businessmen in the back seat of a limo getting cellular about sales. But fantasy has now become reality. As recently as the summer of '91, the label teetered on the verge of bankruptcy, burdened with tremendous debt and bad press—Seattle's music paper the *Rocket* even proclaimed their demise in a cover story titled "SUB PLOP." Pavitt and Poneman, however, rebounded remarkably, reaping the multimillion-dollar benefits from an unlikely set of circumstances; namely, the 2 percent of royalties from Nirvana's *Nevermind* that the label receives from DGC.

But Pavitt and Poneman's greatest rock'n'roll swindle is still to come: Just this past December, the duo reached a deal with Warner Music Group in which the conglomerate will purchase 49 percent of Sub Pop for \$20 million—a thousandfold return on their initial investment, with Pavitt and



Superunknown: Soundgarden circa '86, from left: Chris Cornell, original bassist Hiro Yamamoto, Matt Cameron, and Kim Thayil.

Poneman maintaining complete artistic control. In the role of mogul, Poneman is doing everything except puffing on a cigar.

Oh yeah, he also bought a massage for me.

Along First Avenue, just a few blocks from Sub Pop, the Seattle Art Museum and its towering "Hammering Man" sculpture by Jonathan Borofsky sit directly across the street from the Lusty Lady peep-show



Mudhoney...get it? From left: Dan Peters, Steve Turner, Matt Lukin, and Mark Arm.

theater, while the Sub Pop offices face the triple-X Midtown Theatre (currently playing: *Bi and Busty*), adjacent to the Café Sophie and a couple doors down from the American Institute of Architects. Such are the strange contradictions that arise when a medium-size port city built around the fishing and lumber trades is suddenly blessed with an economic boom brought on by computer software and coffee culture. Which, come to think of it, is not unlike the shotgun marriage of '70s riff-rock end '80s hardcore punk

pioneered by the best of the early Sub Pop bands.

Up in Sub Pop headquarters, a crew is busy installing an alarm system, presumably to prevent interlopers from cracking the safe containing the \$20 million. Three years ago, Sub Pop's phones were on the verge of being cut off; today the label has expanded to cover much of the third floor of the building as well, with separate suites for business, sales, and the warehouse. Where once Poneman and Pavitt's "office" was actually boxes of records kept underneath their respective beds, they now employ over 35 staffers in the Seattle office, another three in the Sub Pop East Coast office in Boston, and six in Europe.

Visitors to the 11th floor are greeted immediately by a reception desk covered with a crazy quilt of rock stickers, with only "I HATE YOUR BAND" standing out, and a nine-foot-high thrift-store style painting by Meure Jasper (who did the covers for Dinosaur Jr.'s first three albums) depicting a wide-eyed wail with spiky blue hair, a pink spiked collar, green boots, and a red sweater bearing the message "Punk Lives!"; quite naturally, the kid is flipping viewers the finger. While Arcwelder blasts out of the office boom box, accountants hired by Warners to audit Sub Pop's books flit about wordlessly, as out of place with their starched white shirts, power ties, and PowerBooks as Sebodoh and Six Finger Satellite will be in the gaping maw of the Warner Music Group.

Once upon a time, the music released by Pavitt and Poneman was strictly the secret of a small audience, in some cases limited to the few thousand subscribers to the Sub Pop Singles Club. Although the "Seattle sound" actually began on Homestead Records with Green River's *Come on Down* in 1985, the sonic mixture of Blecks Sebbed and Flag soon became synonymous with Sub Pop. Bands who had spent their formative years practicing the between-song routines from *Kiss Alive* hit the stage with beer in their bellies, angst in their pants, and Aerosmith's *Rocks* in their heads; this synthesis of heavy and heady, overbite and underground, made for a confrontational yet commercial final product that pleased adherents from both rock and punk camps. Essentially, it was only sped-up, fuzzed-out arena rock minus the light show, but what the men didn't know, the little girls understood.

Back when Beck was still sampling beats from *Fraggle Rock*, Sub Poppers were hyping their "loser" status on T-shirts, a smirky explanation of how socioeconomic forces were squeezing young people's prospects like grapes. The self-deprecation was less "No Future" than "Future? Nah"—too jokey to be serious, and too serious to ignore. The world's a mess. It's in my riff, the guitars seemed to say, so take my job and I'll just crank "Shove." While African-American youth were turning on to nation-building via Public Enemy, disaffected white kids were dropping the needle on grunge vinyl (unfortunately, some were just dropping the needle), although it would take a nation of millions to pull Sub Pop's accounts into the black.

Kurt Cobain would help provide that, because he knew how to deliver his cri de coeur with a pop hook as well as a rusty cage. Honest and direct, yet hardly pompous or preachy, Cobain wrapped his pain within melodies that other Sub Pop bands couldn't—or wouldn't—write. Nirvana's platinum explosion made sense, even if impossible under the terms of the previously existing biz paradigm, and paved the way for much of the Emerald City chart witchcraft that followed, from Pearl Jam to Candlebox to Soundgarden (or for that matter many of 1994's breakthroughs, such as the Offspring, Green Day, and Hole). As far

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as India rock was concerned, Cobain really was the men who sold the world.

Nirvana's DGC success became Sub Pop's Lotto ticket. In addition to the *Navarimind* royalties, Nirvana's debut album, *Blaach*, has sold approximately 800,000 copies, netting Sub Pop nearly \$3 million in profits; there's no telling how things might have turned out if Cobain's favorite label, Touch and Go, hadn't passed on the Nirvana demo, or if a drunken Krist Novoselic hadn't pounded on Pavitt's window in 1989 demanding Sub Pop's first multirecord contract. Pavitt expects the label to achieve sales of \$7 million in '94. When I ask Pavitt who Sub Pop's rival labels are, he shoots back immediately "Sony, Interscope, Elektra." While his response is a bit facetious—Sub Pop successfully competed against major labels to sign both Sebadoh and Valocity Girl, but Pavitt insists there's still not enough money to regularly outbid them—there is enough in the coffers to be able to reissue out-of-print obscurities from groups such as Poison 13 or early Sub Pop flops such as to Blood Circus, as well as distribute four other Northwest Indies: Olympia's K and Seattle's Flydaddy, Super Electro, and Up.

Despita the windfall, a saat-of-the-pants approach still carries the day, with the label sometimes operating in the disorganized but intimate fashion of a small family business. The week of my visit coincides with the Seattle arrival of Jale, a band of four women from Halifax, Nova Scotia, who are in town to support their Sub Pop debut LP, *Dreamcake*, and they get hands-

There's no telling how things
might have turned out if Cobain's
favorite label, Touch and Go,
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on treatment. Dan Trager, publicist Nils Bernstein's assistant, has been pressed into service as soundman, tour manager, and van driver for Jale's West Coast swing. When the band end up with a few extra days in Seattle but don't have enough money to continue their stay at a hotel, Bernstein volunteers his apartment. Bernstein even sets Jale up with his mom for a tarot card reading. No sooner are the women packed up and ready to return to Nova Scotia than the Vancouver group Zumpango arrives in town, and oh yeah, they need a place to stay....

Pavitt calls Bernstein "the heart of the scene" and "a one-man support system," and it seems that the publicist has almost as much to do with the daily functioning of the label as the big men themselves. Pavitt and Panaman constantly emphasize their devotion to their staff, and do their damndest to turn them into celebrities, from picturing staff members inside Sub Pop 200 to putting wholesale accounts guy Curtis Pitts on the cover of a label sampler CD. "Jon always says 'my coworkers,' not 'my employees,'" reports Karri Harrop, shopkeeper at the recently opened Sub Pop Mega Mart retail outlet. "Simple things like that make you convinced you're not getting the shaft."

The employees—excuse me, coworkers—at Sub Pop's third floor operations include Fastbacks singer-bassist Kim Warrick, who works on wholesale accounts, and Beat Heppening's Heather Lewis, who answers the 1-800 sales line. "It's like working for Victoria's Secret," says Lewis, "except that the most frequently asked question is, 'He's only 14, can he wear that to school?'"

One of the other 1-800 operators, Nicky Thomas, has just gotten off the phone with an irate customer from whom she had taken an order a few weeks before. The woman had requested some Sebadoh and Fastbacks records and a Sebadoh T-shirt and had asked if there was any profanity or devil worship on the merchandise. Thomas told her no. Unfortunately the

Sebadoh shirt she was sent—one of a series which feature the band logo screened over a previously owned, randomly chosen rock concert shirt—happened to have the word “fuck” on the back, and according to Thomas, “she’s now convinced that the band is singing about Satan.” Next door in the warehouse, orders are still coming in steadily for those Sebadoh shirts—with or without the “fuck”—but the staff has run out of the used shirts. “So we took our least popular shirt and screened over them,” explains shipper Veronica Martin, pointing out a pile of now-defaced Les Thugs tees. “They’re in France so they’ll never know.”

Flush with funding, the label has branched outside the office for both profit and pleasure. Across the street from the Terminal Sales Building, the Sub Pop Mega Mart became necessary when the steady stream of uninvited visitors tramping through the office proved a nuisance. “It’s like going to the Psychedelic Shop in San Francisco 20 years after Haight-Ashbury,” laughs Pavitt. Linda’s Tavern, the Capitol Hill bar in which Pavitt and Ponaman are investors, has become the label’s de facto watering hole. “I take a lot of pride in this place,” asserts Pavitt. “It’s just a tavern, it’s just beer, but there’s tons of community here. The history of bohemian life always centers around cafés and taverns. It’s where people meet, exchange ideas. It’s where communication happens. Some people come here every fucking day, they live here. It’s their shelter.”

Pavitt programs the singles in the bar’s jukebox, from the Meters’ “Sophisticated Cissy” to Pylon’s “Dub?”/“Cool” to Pat Benatar’s “Hit Me with Your Best Shot” to Zumpano’s “Wraparound Shades.” “The most pleasurable thing I do in my life,” says Pavitt, “is pulling all these black vinyl singles, mixing them up, and putting them into the jukebox. I don’t have to think about the marketing. I don’t have to think about the editor at such and such magazine. I can just deal with music.”

Pavitt has given up his office at Sub Pop and now works out of his home, a three-story wood house he shares with his wife Hannah and 18-month-old daughter Iris in Seattle’s Central District, an ethnically diverse neighborhood just blocks from Garfield High School, which Jimi Hendrix once attended but failed to graduate. It’s a comfortable dwelling, with plenty of room for the assorted memorabilia accumulated over his 15 years in the underground—Frank Kozik posters for various gigs by Sub Pop bands, Charles Burns’s illustration for the Sub Pop 5 cassette, Peter Bagge’s original black-and-white cover art of an issue of *Hate*—but it’s hardly the spread one might expect of a multimillionaire record company boss. Not to worry, though: Pavitt is building a second home in the environmental preserve of the San Juan Islands off the Washington coast, which he’s designing as “an experiment in independent living,” with a self-recycling water system and solar power. “But it’s going to be hooked to the Internet, of course.”

Upstairs in his office, the cartridge from Pavitt’s computer printer has run out of ink, so Sub Pop network administrator Ian Dickson, who Pavitt introduces as “the man who will lead Sub Pop into the 21st century,” is helping him e-mail the 52-page Warner deal over to Ponaman at the office. White Dickson fuses with the modern, Pavitt, barefoot and sporting a T-shirt from the Olympia, Washington, label Kill Rock Stars, walks over to his wall of vinyl and pulls out records by rappers Too Short, Ice-T, and Eric B. and Rakim, and reggae artists Hugh Mundall and Augustus Pablo. “I could listen to Augustus Pablo all day long,” he declares.

Pavitt grabs a copy of rapper Schooly D’s 1985 12-inch “PSK.” “Look at this cover,” he demands, pointing out the small photograph of Schooly and DJ Code Money plopped square in the middle of the back cover, surrounded by a sea of white space and some crudely scrawled lettering. “This is folk art. This is punk. Image is so much of the whole picture, and indie rock refuses to understand this.”

“I look at things in terms of story and media and drama and what initiates folkloric. Tad is folkloric. He’s like a modern Paul Bunyan or something. Reverend Horton Heat is larger than life. If the Reverend was from Newark instead of Dallas, his story wouldn’t resonate as much.” He pauses for effect. “I knew that Sub Pop and Seattle sound good together: the Seattle Sub Pop, the Seattle sound, it’s almost like this alliteration. And then there’s this small label from the middle of nowhere and it makes great music. *That’s* a story.”

With his bald head and long, thick beard, Pavitt resembles a religious



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ascetic. When his daughter toddles up and plops a gray wool hunting cap on his head, he's transformed into a punk-rock Fidel Castro, a revolutionary warrior fighting a guerrilla insurgency against the corrupt old guard of corporate rock. Except that unlike Castro, Pavitt has aligned himself squarely with the running dogs of capitalism. "The history of indie rock is the history of failure," insists Pavitt, citing the demise or decline of seminal labels from Rough Trade to Factory to SST. "It's better to make a deal now from a position of strength than to wait two years when we're hemorrhaging money."

No matter what the rationale, an alliance with "the devil" is quite a leap to make for an iconoclast who's used to doing things for himself. Pavitt grew up in Park Forest, Illinois, an upper-middle-class suburb of Chicago. "A lot of my interest in regional culture stems from the desire to escape the homogenization of my suburban upbringing. Punk rock was the door that led me out of that," says Pavitt.

Not that Pavitt was always a punk. "He had long hair, slightly jocky," says Soundgarden guitarist Kim Thayil, who has known Pavitt since junior high. "He was on the basketball team in junior high and he did track or something. Really popular. Girls were always talking about him: 'Bruce Pavitt, he's a sixth grader.'"

Pavitt and Thayil attended the Active Learning Process Center, a progressive high school, where their fellow classmates also included original Soundgarden bassist Hiro Yamamoto and DGC A&R rep Tom Zutaut, the scout who signed Guns N' Roses. After high school, Pavitt headed west to Olympia, Washington, to attend Evergreen State College, the alternative education institution founded in 1967 to put the "liberal" back in liberal arts. While there from 1979 to 1981, Pavitt "majored in punk rock." DJing at the college radio station KAOS, and working as an intern at Olympia-based *OP* magazine, where he used his access to the information they received from tiny independent labels all over the country to begin publishing his own xeroxed fanzine, *Subterranean Pop*.

"Hi there, my name is Bruce and we have to decentralize our society and encourage local art and things and music," reads the editor's note from the spring 1981 issue, *Sub Pop 3*, which featured back cover art by Jad Fair, sales "charts" boosting local bands such as the Beekers and the Blackouts, end plugs for records on labels such as Armageddon, Lust/Unlust, and Upsetter, all crucially important to the evolution of independent music and all now defunct and largely forgotten. Says Pavitt, "I think the essence of 'alternative rock' when you really break it down is, 'Hey! How about that? There's culture beyond New York and L.A.' Labels can exist outside of that culture."

Inspired by this "network of hobbyists and enthusiasts" pressing their own records before the channels of distribution were in place, Pavitt decided to turn his printed matter into an audio experience, via cassette compilations of bands from different cities. The first release, *Sub Pop 5*, sold 2,000 copies at \$5 a tape, "which at the time was amazing. I paid my rent and electric bill for a year just off these cassettes."

In 1981, Pavitt moved to Seattle, eventually snagging a local music column in the *Rocknet* and a radio show on the University of Washington's KCMU. After helping open a local independent record shop, Pavitt found work at Yesso, a "foreground music" company that had been purchased by Muzak and pioneered the practice of "James Taylor originals being sent to yuppie restaurants." Also employed at the Muzak headquarters were Mark Arm (of Green River and later, Mudhoney), Tad Doyle (later of Tad and Ron Nine [later of Love Battery]). "When we finally got the label off the ground, I had already established relationships with people like Tad and Mark," notes Pavitt. "The comradery kept the label going for a couple of years, because we certainly didn't have any money."

In 1986, Pavitt scraped together enough cash to press one of his compilations onto vinyl. Endowing his record label with the name of his fanzine and cassette series, *Sub Pop 100* included tracks by Sonic Youth, Scritch Acid, the Wipers, and a spoken-word rant by Big Black's Steve Albini. Pavitt ran Sub Pop out of the Muzak offices, and as with most DIY enterprises, funding soon became a major issue. Pavitt put out a Green River single and EP, but if he was going to make a real stab at releasing records, he'd have to find an investor. Thayil, then a DJ at KCMU, knew another station jock who had a local music show and booked bands at a Seattle bar, and suggested he might be good with money.

Jonathan Poneman, like Pavitt, was a Midwesterner, born in Toledo, Ohio. His father was a cardiologist, his mother a political operative and nurse. In 1977, he followed a girlfriend out to Bellingham, Washington; when the relationship fell apart, he moved to Seattle in August of 1979 and attended the University of Washington. During the next few years, Poneman pumped gas, tested Corningware at JC Penney, priced nylon stockings in the basement at Sears, inhaled carcinogens while putting together synthetic yarn, worked for Yesco prior to Pavitt's hiring, and guarded the backstage door at Seattle's Paramount Theater, where he would later see Green River open for Public Image Ltd. But the show that changed Poneman's life was a Chavo-era (pre-Rollins) Black Flag gig, his first American punk rock experience. "The best rock music is obviously always a very physical experience, and that was like a total," recalls Poneman.

Poneman tried his own hand at simulating that physical experience by playing bass and keyboards in Seattle bands the Rockefellers and the Treeclimbers. His fervor to spread "Treeclimbermania" led him to host the "Audioasis" local music show at KCMU, which in turn led to a gig booking local groups at a bar called the Rainbow Tavern. For one of his first bills, he programmed the bands of two other KCMU DJs, Ben McMillan's Skin Yard and Thuyli's Soundgarden. Poneman missed Skin Yard, but arrived in the middle of Soundgarden's set. Completely floored, Poneman decided immediately he wanted to release a Soundgarden record, but wasn't quite



"The look of fresh money": Poneman and Pavitt in 1988.

sure how. They'd suggested to Poneman that he hook up with Pavitt, whom Poneman knew from a positive review Pavitt had written of the Treeclimbers in his *Rocket* column. The idea, however, was met with initial resistance. "I was very aware of Sub Pop," says Poneman of Pavitt's profile in the Seattle scene at the time, "but I always saw him as the competition. I always thought Bruce was a real slick business guy and had his shit together. Why would he need me?"

Well, for one thing, cash flow. As Poneman boasts, "One of the gifts I've always had, in all modesty, is the ability to bullshit people out of their money." With Poneman's financial input and acumen, Sub Pop released Soundgarden's *Screaming Life*. By April 1, 1988, after records by Swallow, Blood Circus, and Green River's posthumous album *Rehab Doll*, they were convinced that the venture was more of a business than a hobby, so they pooled their savings, rented office space, and quit their day jobs.

"To be honest, we did a few mildly dishonest things to stay in business," admits Pavitt, recalling a conversation Poneman had with the phone company in August 1988. "AT&T was saying, 'We're going to disconnect your service,' and face it, a record company without a phone is fucked. I remember going for a walk, and I could hardly breathe, just thinking, 'It's just so harsh, so harsh. Four months and we're out of business. Fuck it. Fuck it. That's it.' But instead, when I got back to the office, we both decided that we were going to write a rubber check to the phone company, and that kept our phone on for another seven days. We would do stuff like that once in a while. To this day I don't balance my checkbook, and I don't think Jon balances his....It's a totally unprofessional way to run a business.



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"We were in a constant state of denial," continues Pavitt. "We were going on pure gut instinct and a fanaticism for the music that defied rational thinking. My parents pleaded, 'Get a real job.'"

But Sub Pop became a real job, and almost seven years down the road, it's finally become a living. While Pavitt and Poneman's fanaticism has certainly ebbed, their admiration for each other remains strong. Pavitt calls Poneman "a classic A&R person," while Poneman gushes that Pavitt "is the best partner a guy could have. We have a complementary though very different way of hearing things. Bruce is the sub, I am the pop." Pavitt championed Mudhoney, Poneman Nirvana; Pavitt the Dwarves, Poneman the Afghan Whigs; Pavitt the Supersuckers, Poneman Velocity Girl.

When he's not trawling for talent, Poneman practices transcendental meditation, likes to cook, and lives in an apartment he describes as "a drab marriage between Brezhnev-era Soviet architecture and early '70s California." A boom box serves as his stereo system; when he has to listen to test pressings he borrows the office turntable. His greatest passion isn't for music but books, despite his dyslexia; he's more likely to strike up a conversation on the works of William T. Vollmann than on the work of Will Oldham.

Pavitt has taken advantage of his recent prosperity to indulge a barbecue Jones; he proudly shows off a \$2,000 smoker from Texas he's installed on his patio. He's also formulated an analogy between barbecue and punk rock. "People essentially create something from nothing," he posits. "Look

"My wife and daughter aren't going to leave me for a major label," says Pavitt. "They're going to be here tomorrow."

at ribs. Here's a guy, all he's got is some logs and some bones, and a small room with a couple of chairs, and he creates a work of art. It's like a young punk in his basement: He's got a \$10 Japanese guitar and creates a work of art. To me, that's a really beautiful thing." The Internet has also become a muse for Pavitt, ever eager to relate culture back to the community it springs from. Sub Pop has had a World Wide Web site for a year now, and one of the benefits of the Warner deal is the monetary resources it provides to upgrade their hardware.

When Pavitt waxes visionary about cyber utopias, punk iconography, or barbeque semiotics, a glint flashes in his eyes; sometimes the grandness of the ideas seems overwhelming, and he needs to squint to get his concepts out. Pavitt's passion for outside projects coincides with his retreat from an active role in the company. Wearying of the bitter realities of the industry, he has receded into the background to become more of a spiritual figurehead, letting Poneman handle the daily task of helming Sub Pop. "When Nirvana left, I cried for a long time," says Pavitt. "I was in public places, and it was really embarrassing. But to be honest, that's one of the reasons I kind of dropped out of doing A&R, because I take it really personally, and I know Jon does too. It's turned me more cynical and less trusting of people, and that's one of the reasons I chose to focus on my family. My wife and daughter aren't going to leave me for a major label. They're going to be here tomorrow."

By now, Dickson has located a new cartridge and printed out a copy of the contract. As if on cue, little Iris notices that her mother is no longer home and starts to cry. Pavitt rolls the printout into a cone as he scoops up his daughter and holds her close to his chest, bouncing her slightly to soothe her tears. "Well, kid, I coo into her ear as the bawling subsides, "this paper is gonna pay for your college education."

Sub Pop's ascendancy was a triumph in media manipulation and marketing prowess; in its prime, the label delivered one masterstroke after another. In November 1988, for example, it launched the Sub Pop Singles Club, a monthly series of limited-edition 45s that restricted supply in order to drive up demand. Kicking off with 1,000 copies of Nirvana's debut, "Love Buzz"/"Big Cheese," the club became the indie-rock equivalent of a gold star of heppiness on a band's forehead and helped usher in a vinyl revival.

In December 1988 came *Sub Pop 200*. While they could have simply fit the compilation's 71 minutes of music on a single CD or a double album, Pavitt and Poneman instead packaged the sampler as a three-EP boxed set in a limited edition of 5,000, complete with a 16-page booklet of Charles Peterson's photographs. Peterson's work—always streaked with the blurred motion of hair throwing, guitar battering, or stage-diving—emphasized the dynamic energy of the scene, conveying a physicality too cathartic to be captured by a mere shutter speed. While the music-making may have lagged behind the image-making, the project's hubris proclaimed that something truly monumental was erupting in the Northwest. Seattle had indeed become, as Soundgarden sang, "Sub Pop Rock City."

By his own count Pavitt boasts that he and Poneman did interviews every day for over a year. As sales of *Nevermind* spiraled up the charts in 1991 and '92, the switchboard lit up like the Space Needle at night. Poneman penned a piece for *Vogue* that accompanied a photo spread of emaciated models who looked like heroin addicts. Flannel-clad celebrities such as Joan Rivers posed in *Vanity Fair*. The most ridiculous media event of all came when a *New York Times* reporter called the office looking for tips on hipster slang, and Sub Pop receptionist Megan Jasper made up a bunch of nonsense terms on the spot; her "Grunge Lexicon," with expressions such as "cob nobbler" (loser) and "swingin' on the flippy-flop" (hanging out) ran in the *Times* in November 1992 without anyone at the paper bothering to corroborate it.

Sub Pop developed the commercial potential of the underground until it wasn't underground anymore. "Smells Like Teen Spirit" is now played by the organist at the Seattle Kingdome, and was adapted to strings for a Muzak version. Yesco wound up putting out a "Seattle Sounds" tape using a number of Sub Pop songs. Displayed in the window of the Seattle Shirt Co., a tourist boutique a few blocks from Sub Pop, are T-shirts for Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Citizen Dick, the grunge-by-numbers group from Cameron Crowe's *Singles*. The Sub Pop Mega Mart is included on walking-tour maps given to visitors of Seattle. In the span of less than seven years, Sub Pop's great discovery exploded from the province of tiny, sweaty shithole clubs to Larry "Bud" Meilan 1-800 Collect commercials. Can you find it in your heart to forgive them, dude?

Not everyone can. Pavitt once described grunge as "the sound and lack of fresh money, the sound of the underground finally getting paid"; unfortunately, even at the height of their media blitz, Sub Pop was in dire financial straits. Throughout 1991, the label had all the stability of a Charles Keating-run savings and loan. "Everybody was bad at their finances," says Jenny Boddy, Sub Pop publicist at the time. "That's why we all got along so well." There wasn't enough money to print up press kits for their bands, so the staff had to go the local Kinko's during their "Happy Hour" when copies were three cents instead of five. With characteristic Sub Pop sarcasm, the label printed up T-shirts reading "WHAT PART OF 'WE HAVE NO MONEY DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?' Checks for \$100 bounced, and much of the staff had to be laid off. "There were some black Mondays," remembers Boddy. Eventually, everyone got paid—all involved insist it was only a matter of when, not if—but Pavitt remembers that summer bitterly. "I don't think I've ever reached a lower point in my life," he says.

Pavitt and Poneman both insist that today the company is debt-free, and Pavitt adds that "if by chance somebody did not get paid, they should give me a call and—" he snaps his fingers. Karmic debts are another story, however. Most of the bands affiliated with the label at that time can recount a financial nightmare. Members of Dwarves even broke into the office and spray-painted "You Owe Dwarves \$" on the floor.

Certainly, disgruntled musicians are nothing new in indieedom. Scratch the back catalog of almost any indie label and you'll find a litany of familiar complaints such as undersized staffs and fiscal inexperience. Sub Pop's



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rap sheet, however, includes allegations of prioritizing certain acts at the expense of others, signing too many artists, becoming hard to reach, dropping bands—in short, all the cold, clinical practices usually associated with major labels.

Part of the musicians' dissatisfaction comes with the limited resources of the territory, and in many ways Sub Pop is no different from other indies. In Sub Pop's infancy, the label was basically a couple of friends putting out music by other friends. "Bruce didn't even know what we sounded like, and he gave us money to go in and record 'Touch Me I'm Sick' and 'Sweet Young Thing,'" remembers Mudhoney's Mark Arm. "We hadn't even played a live show yet." "We did everything on ladies' agreement," says Jennifer Finch of L7, whose "Shove" single and *Smell the Magic* EP helped pave the way for equal-opportunity mosh pits.

But Sub Pop's increasing profile and big-ticket earnings introduced the idea of profit and dividends to the indie equation, and as Cyndi Lauper used to say (or maybe it was Karl Marx?), money changes everything. "They've amassed their fortune with all the finesse of a blind man tripping over money in the street," says Barry Hensler, singer of Big Chief, who left Sub Pop for Capitol. "I can't see how they could possibly squander the funds they've now been blessed with, but I'm sure they'll have a fine time doing it."

Even when they were benefiting from the buzz that the label nematode provided, bands have been less than fully enchanted. "They were constantly having control right away," Kurt Cobain told writer Michael Azzerad in his book *Come As You Are*, about Pavitt editing down a sound collage on Nirvana's first single against Cobain's wishes. "Doing exactly what a major label would do and claiming to be such an independent label." Cobain even wrote "Big Cheese" about Poneman's string-pulling.

"I was pissed off about the way they marketed Tad," says Thayll, recalling Tad's debut single on which "Hi, my name is Tad" was crudely scrawled in backward letters. "Tad is a really smart guy, he's really articulate, and they marketed him as this big, brooding sort of lughead. I said, 'That's not funny. Major labels do that shit all the time.'"

"We got lost in the shuffle," says Chris Siusarenko of Sprinkler, one of the bands Sub Pop signed in the great Portland invasion of 1991. "I thought since they had been so close to being bankrupt they'd be a little more careful or selective, but instead it seems like they've gotten tons of bands." When an impoverished Pavitt and Poneman came down to Portland, Siusarenko had to buy them dinner; six months later it was a different story. "It's a big change from having Jonathan or Bruce sleep on your floor to not being able to get them on the phone," says Siusarenko.

"We never felt we were a Sub Pop priority," says Ron Nine of Love Battery, now signed to Atlas/A&M Records. According to Nine, once Sub Pop learned that Love Battery was exploring other label options, they soft-pedaled the release of the band's new album, *Far Gone*, despite the record's considerable production cost. "Jon mentioned to our manager that it would be 'buried' because we were signing to another label," says Nine, who remains friendly with the pair despite the bad business blood.

"I never said anything of the sort," says Poneman, emphatically denying that Sub Pop prioritizes bands. "Buried" is not part of my lexicon. As far as I'm concerned, we did our part. The whole idea that I am going to take a record and forget about it is absurd. It is up to the band and it is up to the marketplace. We're a record label, and we do the same things other record labels do. We try to maintain a certain amount of humanity, decency, intimacy, and flexibility in what we do, but at the end of the day it's a business, and I don't have any apologies for that. I think that a lot of times bands have a skewed way of looking at things...People have to take accountability for their own careers. I've had to. Everybody does. You can't blame one party or the other for why you're not a rock star. I don't sit there and throw darts and say, 'Well, the bull's-eye will be Love Battery and the outer ring will be Mudhoney.' That's counterproductive, unprofessional, and ultimately it's preposterous."

The fact remains that Bruce Pavitt and Jonathan Poneman are multimillionaires, and most of the musicians associated with their label are not. By and large, the artists are grateful for the opportunities the indie kingpins have provided them. Still, no matter how familiar things get, no matter how touchy-feely the management-labor relations appear to be, Pavitt and

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Poneman run a record company, and their test line of defense is invariably the bottom one.

It's the week before the signing of the Warner deal and Pavitt has just returned from Los Angeles, where he and Poneman saw Sunny Day Real Estate play a show at the Viper Room. With a video in rotation at MTV and sales of over 65,000 for its debut album *Diary*, SDRE is Sub Pop's hottest band right now, but it's also on the verge of breaking up. Singer-guitarist Jeremy Enigk announced in an Internet posting that he has given his life to Jesus Christ, and wants to devote his future music to spreading the gospel, a career move which isn't completely shared by his bandmates or by Pavitt. While he respects Enigk's beliefs, Pavitt isn't comfortable with a record whose content might endorse the agenda of the religious right. At least initially. After a moment's pause, Pavitt has devised another marketing plan. "It could be a brilliant new direction for Sub Pop," muses Pavitt about a Christian emo-core album. "Get the full-on endorsement from Newt."

Wooing the architect of the Contract With America is just a joke, but these days anything seems possible given the label's aesthetic flux. As Pavitt has assumed more of a background role at Sub Pop, so too has the raucous high-energy rock he used to champion. Where once Pavitt and Poneman promoted the music of Northwest bands with an almost jingoistic fervor, now there are as many bands from the Canadian Maritime provinces on the label as there are from Seattle. Where once Sub Pop stood for lighter-flickin', hair-swingin', bong-hittin' rock, now the label's major export is light, melodic, college radio pop. Where once the label's attitude was embodied by the leviathan lumberjunks of Ted or the (quite literally) naked aggression of the Dwarves, now the label pinups are more likely to be the terminally blend Velocity Girl, a band so freshly scrubbed you want to pinch their cheeks more than tap your feet. The label even boasts an ersatz lounge band, Combustible Edison, playing homage to the glorified cocktail Muzak of yesteryear. What in the name of teen spirit is going on?

"A lot of people who appreciate the early records might be disappointed in some of the stuff we work with now," says Pavitt, "but in a lot of ways it's just us saying, 'We're not one-dimensional dudes who put out grunge rock.'"

Case in point: Sub Pop night at Seattle's Crocodile Club. For this evening's showcase, Poneman has flown in Glasgow's Peinkillers, the new band of former Veselina Frances McKee. Performing as a duo, their amateurish charm barely gets them by. Next up is Vancouver's Zumpano, a youthful quartet who attempt to evoke prepsychedelic West Coast '60s pop groups like the Turtles; unfortunately, they sound more like the Partridge Family. The band all wear sportcoats, but not matching ones, which distinguishes them from the evening's headliner, Combustible Edison. Combustible's urbane renewal grooves with all the schmeitz and none of the conviction of a bar mitzvah band, playing soft and saying nothing. When bandleader the Millionaire announces, "This next number is reminiscent of mysterious foreign lends we've never been to; it's called 'Breakfast at Denny's,'" there's enough irony in the room to take all the wrinkles out of your clothes.

It's admirable that Sub Pop moved away from its signature sound before it grew stale, but for a label that made its mark stressing its identity above all else, it's quite a turnabout to be without one. Company sales may be up, and Sebadoh, for one, enjoys substantial critical and underground credibility, but a Sub Pop release is no longer a subcultural event. A few years back it released a label compilation called *Revolution Come and Gone*—wink wink, grunge grunge—but it's turned out to be more confession than sarcasm. Having rewritten history, Sub Pop's mission may have run its course. "We live in such an accelerated culture it's almost weird to think of something that happened four years ago as being historical," says L7's Finch. "But I don't think that the kind of presence Sub Pop had still exists."

"When it comes to pop culture, timing is everything," says Pavitt. "Sure, a lot of people could say we were in the right place in the right time, but if we weren't there and Sub Pop wasn't there, none of that shit would have happened. Nirvana would be playing the Evergreen dome right now. Seriously."

For now, Pavitt and Poneman are content reveling in the contradictions of their status, and their scene. Such is the Sub Pop way. "Fake indie or fake major," muses Pavitt. "I still haven't figured it out." ●

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PRAYERS, NIGHTMARES, & ECSTASIES

I am not a believer, nor a disbeliever. I once saw an angel and I have talked with God, but the former occurred at the magnetic north pole when extreme cold and the wrong sleeping bag caused me to substitute hallucinations for sleep, and the latter would never have happened without the assistance of psilocybin mushrooms. Neither apparition qualifies as miraculous; but although I used to long for a miracle as much as when I was a child and craved to taste fresh hot asphalt in the summer, I no longer need such exotic candy because a candle in a doorway can be as eerie as a talking skull.

Anyhow, rationalism explains anything. A supernatural stone strikes, makes ripples, and sinks into the obscurity of science. For example, a Haitian man I met in Miami was telling me about the time he drove a few blocks away from his smashed marriage and came to a voodoo lady's botanica. The woman told him: "Your life's fucked up, man. You don't see anymore. Just now you ran a red light."

My friend realized with a chill that he'd done exactly that at the previous intersection. He, of course, had an

Voodoo, hoodoo, and Santería are alive and well in the American South. WILLIAM T. VOLLMANN goes searching for a cure to the violence that lurks in the hearts of men.



Telling fortunes: Miriam reads the future from the fall of the cat bones.

explanation. The woman (who'd never met him before and had no reason to expect him) had seen him run the red light.

Since my relationship with his experience was secondhand, I had more opportunities for disbelief. He could be lying. The voodooist could have somehow hypnotized him. She might have heard him pull up screeching in front of her botanica and made a well-founded guess that he was the type to run red lights. Nona of this means anything. One might almost say that magic is by definition a personal matter. If a drunk sees pink elephants, no one can tell him differently.

I am interested in religion because violence is so often irrational that we may well require something irrational to control it, and of all the irrational control mechanisms that come to mind, religion would seem to have the greatest potential to do good.

With this in mind, I set out for the Deep South, where a jungle of sects and creeds grows high. I knew that I would remain ignorant of most of them, misunderstand some of the rest, and gain a very superficial knowledge of two or three. But I accepted that and became a student of crooks, saints, *santeros* and *santeras*, end—most often—voodoo priests.

CARRYING CHRIST IN YOUR HEART (NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA)

Let me begin at Geno's Lounge, where the sign said that no one under 30 was allowed. This was in a black neighborhood in New Orleans, and although the French Quarter was only ten minutes away by foot there were no tourists here. Police

cars would stop and through a rolled-down window the officers would ask me what I was doing there. In the beauty parlor across the street, well-meaning black ladies told me that it was getting too late in the afternoon for me to be safe (it was about 3:30 P.M., near the longest day of the year).

There was a man at Geno's Lounge named James Brooks, who said: "Wa'ra virtually at rock bottom right now. When I came up, the neighbors would take care of the children. They'd feed 'em, they'd clean them up, they'd send them off to school. Nowadays, you gotta fear your little girl going to school, she's gonna get raped. Or your boy's gonna get raped."

"We are living the signs of the times," Brooks said. "People gotta get close to God. You know, sometimes if you're ridin' along, if you're traveling by highway, you see all these trees and wilderness; there's more'n enough land for everybody. So why destroy all these beautiful lives?"

Brooks had lost a nephew, murdered over drugs. As he was telling me this, a police siren squealed grimly outside. "You hear that all day," he said. "All this killing going on."

I asked what the nearby churches were like. "I myself converted to Methodist," Mr. Brooks said. "Ironically enough, I visit the Catholic church most of all, because it's short and sweet. You know, if it's Christian at heart you can go anywhere. You can go even to bars if you carry Christ in your heart."

Just outside of Geno's Lounge there was a long vast arm of concrete over which traffic struggled and scuffled in the humid dusk, and between

the pillars that supported this activity, crack pushers and prostitutes flirted with the world.

Left would take you to the liquor store with the wall of bulletproof glass inside; to the three coffee-colored girls in bandannas and earrings who sat on their stoop waiting for opportunity and gava different names every day; the prettiest one, with the slender face and the peacock's fan of hair, called herself first LaToya, than Baby Girl, than Baby Doll; left would also take you to the corner store with the handwritten sign saying: "THIS IS NOT A CAFE HOUSE! (1) DO NOT CARRY DRUGS IN HERE. (2) NO SITTING AROUND WITHOUT BUYING SOMETHING. THIS IS NOT A HOSPITAL OR BOARDING HOUSE. (3) DON'T STAND IN FRONT OF BUSINESS."

Right, on the other hand, would take you to Pastor Brown's church, the Full Gospel Church of God in Christ, where the pastor's son, Charles, Jr., was leading choir rehearsal. "Put your arms at your sides," Charles commanded. "Raady? Sing it!"

"OHHHHHH!" went the choir in G major.

"Okay," said Charles. "Now let's hear it! Om-ni-potent is my great Lord!"

The choir obliged, again and again. They were swaying, clapping, smiling as they sang. Charles, slender and pate-shaved, held the microphone in his left hand and pointed his right forefinger at the choir like a pistol. Together they made pure beauty.

I also had the chance to visit the church on Sunday when Charles's father preached the sermon of the dead church (Revelations), before and after which the choir sang in an ecstasy which, I believe, caught up everybody in the congrega-

"In every church there's somebody doing witchcraft to disunify it."



tion, my friend Nathan and me also, everyone shooting up both hands while singing as if to reach up to God. The motto of the Full Gospel Church of God is "Always Be Nice," and they were. From the pulpit, Pastor Brown called upon Nathan and me to rise and give our names; and after we did everyone filed to our pew to welcome us and shake our hands.

In the three or four times that I visited this church, it was always strange to step in and feel loved and then step out again and wonder if somebody under the freeway would shoot me. In a very real sense, the house of God was under siege. "If you go down a side street or something, then maybe somebody put a gun to your head or something," said Charles matter-of-factly.

"Is there much voodoo around here?"

"When you say voodoo, it's hard to say who," Charles said. "In every church there's somebody doing witchcraft to disunify the church. In this church, Satan has his plan; just like God has His plan. And we have some members who were going to fortune-tellers, opening the door to voodoo, before we saved them."

"SOMETIMES WE CAN'T DO IT ALONE" (LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA)

Seeing Charles or his father was easy. But to see Mr. M you had to be prepared to mark off at least two hours, maybe three. Nathan and I were lucky. We spent only about two and a half hours

Charles Brown, Jr., leads a rehearsal of the Full Gospel Church choir.

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Healing touch: Miriam anoints Nathan with magic oil.

don't know how many years. So that's how I know Black Hawk is after me."

"Why's he on your case, Ed?"

"Well, I think my mother-in-law or somebody outside my family she put something on me. I always thought my mother-in-law wanted me to work two jobs to keep her daughter satisfied. My daddy's mother-in-law, her name is Moriah. I tell you, I never go around that grave, 'cause she gonna put me in there. She made my daddy rise out of his coffin when he died. She made him turn evil. She's after me, too. She had red, red eyes."

"So what can you do to keep those ladies off you?"

"I light candles to the good saints like Saint George, Saint Anthony, Saint Jude."

"If you lit a candle to Moriah and said you wanted to be friends, what would happen?" I ventured, having read in a book by a Haitian voodoo adept that the higher soul or *bha* rises into "the high solar regions of the atmosphere," whereas the inferior soul, the *ka*, "remains, by its nature, with the corpse...it is responsible for all the dread that the deceased's close friends experience." According to this text, a flower, a song or a prayer can mollify the *ka*. But of course Ed's faith was a mirror of his powerlessness, for he replied: "She'd blow it out. She would never be my friend."

Ed lived an existence of many terrors. He was afraid, for instance, that at any time his mother-in-law might slip green cheese into his food and thereby inflame his stomach with snakes. Why should beliefs like these be adaptive? The only explanation that makes sense is the one to which Willy led me. Reification is the first step to control. Scientists believe this also. If you cannot isolate and name a chemical substance, you cannot work with it. One is inclined to think that religion deals with the immaterial, but voodoo does precisely the opposite, taking all the impalpable economic and social apprehensions of life and personifying them.

Maybe a man cannot address his general sense of failure and inadequacy that he feels in the presence of his mother-in-law because he is poor, badly educated, and alcoholic and therefore unable to support his wife. Most likely he will never be able to get a good job. He must live at his mother-in-law's house and each day ingest her contempt along with her cooking. But at least if he burns candles in secret and watches for green cheese on his plate, he may keep some sense of self-determination. The unspoken tension that thickens year after year between himself and the mother-in-law may have no antidote, but at least if he has some weapons on his side he may be able to look her—and his wife—in the face.

How can one win over the Emperor of Nothingness?

"I BELIEVE WE CAN GET THINGS WORKED OUT OKAY"

But voodoo is and of itself is not a negativistic religion. Some people, like Ed, use it simply to objectify their hopelessness; others to give themselves hope. One day Nathan and I went by the Voodoo Spiritual Temple of Priestess Miriam and Priest Osawan Chamani, with its sign that said "SPECIAL VOODOO ITEMS," and the curtains drawn behind it.

If you were to knock on the door or bang on the glass, no one would answer. You had to call from the pay phone next door. Sometimes you might have to wait because a black boy would be making a crack deal on that phone, and if you stood behind him he'd warn you to give him time. This happened to me three or four times with three or four different boys.

Usually it was Miriam's son who let you in, and brought you to the courtyard in back, to sit where it was cooler until Miriam was free; people might be sitting around a table with a brazier of burning cloves, drinking tea, smoking, and talking. "You know, that's old slave quarters," said Nathan, pointing to the balconies. "That's how they built 'em back then, built 'em longways."

Inside the store (which is really what it was, although they called it a temple), transparent beads hung from an immense crucifix. There was a picture of Erzulie, who is a goddess of love and also an analogue for the Virgin Mary. There was a skull with a black hat and some tall pointy-headed figures, an idealized portrait of Marie Laveau, the 19th-century voodoo queen of New Orleans. In the print, Marie was holding a chicken and some Terrot cards.

When I had visited Marie Laveau's burial place, I saw that it was a magnificent triple-decker, with X's scrawled so thickly and furiously over each portal that they seemed to swarm like scary materializations of this confident, madame, businesswoman, and poisoner; ("The X's are like if you wanna make a wish," Baby Doll explained. When I asked what she wished for, she said: "I want lotsa money. Gimme lotsa money!").

As we were about to leave, Nathan spied another tomb within whose hex-X'd perimeter somebody, Nathan guessed a crazy homeless soul, had taped a xerox of a face over the inscribed marble, handwritten a new name, and left behind a bag of ferns, now limp and decayed. Somehow this seemed more eerie to me than anything around Marie Laveau's tomb. I think

because anytime something is institutionalized, including magic and religion, I get bored and worried. And I think now of Kevin, squatting cross-legged in the grass of the Catholic cemetery, Kevin thin and handsome and Cajun-looking in his white shirt, a cigarette between his fingers and a dirty rib bone propped up against the brick wall of a breached grave. Kevin and I returned that rib to its home, but sometimes I wonder whether we should have taken it with us and done something with it, something fine and extravagant and new.

At any rate, back in the Voodoo Spiritual Temple, Miriam rubbed her palms together and then shuffled the clicking bones back and forth; then she let the bones down onto a cloth with yellow spokes and stared at them for awhile. "I see a certain situation that could cost you some losses," she said to Nathan. "Certain female persons. It may be a bad situation from September or August until this year in April."

Nathan leaned toward her, gesturing, explaining, "One of the reasons I came back is 'cause my grandmother passed away." Nathan said, "But I also got divorced. December is when it became final."

She leaned forward, the hand curled around the cat bones that would reveal more (she preferred to buy her cat bones, because, as she once told me: "Our hearts just couldn't teach us to sacrifice those cats, black cats and calicos. Those cats were just too pretty. You could do a chicken, you could do a lamb, but to take an innocent cat...").

"An' you had any children?" she said.

"No."

"You got some kinda settlement of property?"

"No."

She sat still for awhile. Then she picked up the bones again and tossed them from hand to hand; finally she leaned down, and slowly let the bones tink down. "You will meet up with another lady, which you will have more success with," Miriam said. "This lady will work very closely with you. An' I see you traveling on a Thursday. An' if you're looking at a money situation, it could be Friday this week, maybe next Friday. So July will be a time when you're finishing up, signing papers, getting everything ready. You're gonna get married an' you're gonna have a little boy child. Is that what you wanted?"

"No," said Nathan steadily. "I don't

"That voodoo can only get to

want any children."

"Well, it could be some people working very close to you." The room was humid and dazzling, the walls white, the floor almost empty. "Is the ex-wife having any dialogue with you?" Miriam asked gently.

"Well, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. I wanna get her back."

Miriam tilted. "You wanna get her back? But you divorced her."

"No," said Nathan. "She divorced me."

"Well, let's see. What's her birth sign?"

Nathan told her.

"Is she in the U.S.?"

"Yes. Here, in the French Quarter."

"Have you seen other women?"

"Yes."

"And what was your wife's response?"

"It's great if it makes me happy."

"An' when she broke up, what did she accuse you of?"

"She just said she didn't wanna be married."

"And when you saw her last, how was her response?"

"She, she made love to me."

She laughed. "Well, at least you got that far with her."

Nathan smiled politely, sitting there pale and sweating as he thought about his wife.

"Well," said Miriam, "maybe she will come to some decision, unless she'll hold to the fact that you're divorced." She paused. "If I put something together, can you come back and pick it up?"

"Yeah," said Nathan.

She went and got a notebook and wrote down their first and last names. "Well," Miriam said

SOME DEFINITIONS

What exactly is voodoo?

"Everything essential to the knowledge of the mystery is implicit in this word," says Milo Rigaud in *Secrets of Voodoo*. "Vo means 'introspection' and du means 'into the unknown'... The voodoo rites, derived from the supernatural, proceed from the influence of the sun in the atmosphere."

According to Robert Tallant in his book *Voodoo in New Orleans*, "The raids on the African Slave Coast began about 1724, and thousands of those snake worshippers were sold into the West Indies. With them, they carried a word, which was the name of their god. The word was *Vodu*."

"Voodoo used to be a religion," a young black crackhead told me ("I just do one or two rocks a day," he said, "I ain't hooked"). "But it ain't no religion no more. It's like the Devil and all that 666 and that stuff, man. It don't mean *bullshit*. I'm a Christian. And I know that when you go through the Projects you may get shot or you

beauty parlor, where a girl sat with the cape tucked all around her, and the beautician, in a long dark glossy apron, was braiding her hair while in the swivel chair behind them, the next client sat in shorts, with a towel about her shoulders, a tiny TV whispering into the back of her head. This woman smiled, and said, "Most people don't go to church. The young people, no. We pray for them. I'm Catholic."

"You think the young people are into voodoo?"

"I think mostly the older people are into that. That's God. Voodoo is believing in God."

"That ain't religion," the beautician cut in. "I have a lady in the projects that does that stuff. That scares me."

"Does she talk about it much?"

"Oh yes. They're still in full bloom. Just be careful where you ask. A customer of mine went to her, to save her man, keep her man from leaving."

"Did it work?"

"No."

"Why don't the young people believe?"

"Because they don't fear nothing. If I feel I have to answer to somebody, maybe I don't take a life. But the parents want to be the child's friend, 'cause we work too hard and we want their life to be better than ours. It's a mistake to think like that."

Now it's my turn. Voodoo as practiced in the southern United States is both a religion and a magical way of fulfilling wishes. In keeping with its African origins, practitioners are usually, but not exclusively, black. The actual religious system seems to me to have survived more completely among recent immigrants from Haiti, where blacks working through secret voodoo societies succeeded in overthrowing the French colonial regime, than among blacks who have lived in the U.S. for many generations, and have therefore been at least partially assimilated into white Christian culture.

The essential tenet of voodoo, from a layman's point of view, is that the universe is filled with various foes, or spirits, which can be propitiated—and which react accordingly. Hoodoo is simply voodoo filtered through the Baptist faith instead of through Catholicism. Senteria is a voodoo-like faith, with different foes, all syncretized with Catholic saints, probably to disguise its rites in the old slave days.



In the voodoo spiritual temple: tools of the trade.

you if you let it get to you. It's all about makin' you mind turn in on itself."

smiling, "why not get back together? Marriage is marriage. Although from your birthdates I see you have some ups and downs. I believe we can get things worked out okay."

Nathan and I went out, and it was still so hot that it felt good when a raggedy kid got us in the back with his squirt gun; and we proceeded to the nearest bar with cold beer glowing over the narrow cooler, a guy with stringy long blond hair turning his baseball cap slowly in his fingers to dry the sweat off; and Nathan said: "You know, at first I didn't like Miriam. But there's something about her, it just makes me feel good and makes me want contact with her."

may not. It's written on the Lord's calendar. It's destiny, man."

"How do you deal with violence in your heart?" I asked him.

"I try to stay away from it. And I pray for my brothers and my sisters. And I pray for the protection of the good Lord."

The proprietor of the spiritist shop, continuing with his defensive analogies, said: "It's like if you buy a gun for protection. That's religion. But if you use it just to murder someone, that's voodoo."

Two other definitions of voodoo were given to me across the street from Geno's Lounge, in the

WHY MOIRA DIDN'T NEED THE MAGIC ROCKS (KEY WEST, FLORIDA)

I don't think that the Cajun prayer-healer I visited in Raceland, Louisiana, cured my wrists. They had developed repetitive stress injury on my 30th birthday, and nothing had seemed to help them.

The healer told me to cut down on my salt, fried foods, and alcohol and to pray more. She recommended a specific B-vitamin. Then she began matter-of-factly to pray over me. She gripped my wrists gently, supporting them in one hand, with the other so sweetly and kindly drawing an invisible poison out, then shaking it down onto the carpet like an ectoplasmic fluid.

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After spending several thousand dollars on various doctors over the years, I am able to report that nobody else has cured my wrists, either. And as I sit typing this, I am waiting for the usual stabbing pains to start, and they haven't. Maybe my wrists are a little better. Who knows?

But that isn't the point. When I go to a doctor I almost never feel that he has any interest in me. He may be mildly interested in my malady, of course. I remember one time when I had intestinal parasites and the doctor inserted a greased viewing tube into my rectum. She went out and returned with a crew of medical students. They all took turns looking up my ass. Not one said hello to me, now they weren't doing anything wrong; they only wanted to learn; and in the medical profession busyness makes coldness. And I have in fact met some doctors who do care. But what I felt in the course of so many of the encounters I am writing about here is that there was a basic humanity.

Nathan never got his wife back. One night he went to see her again and came back almost suicidal; a couple of weeks later he flew down to Ecuador with 30 bucks in his pocket and two days left on his visa, not sure whether he was going to marry his favorite whore or the police chief's daughter. But I truly believe that Miriam, who not inappropriately had been trained as a nurse, had healed him a little bit—not much, not enough, but she had done something with her kindness and her caring looks and her cool fingers.

I understood all this better when I visited the slender, cigarette-smoking psychic healer Molra Brown in Key West. I had known and loved her for a number of years. She worked mainly in Europe and New York these days, where she made a good living. She had special racks that her teacher had given her; she also burned incense, and sometimes put into a lovely little glass bowl, colored like a map of clouds, some symphony of aromatic essences which she'd conducted herself, the under-current being always a high-quality almond oil of palest amber. But to her, none of these were anything more than devices. They made people who were susceptible to them more receptive; more suggestible; she didn't depend on them.

What Molra did when you lay on the table was to walk about you, thinking and listening, and trying to see you with her eyes closed, then touching the pressure points, drawing the bad energy out and throwing it away in exactly the same way that the Raeland woman had done. She saw that my right foot was hurting me even though I hadn't told her. Once she was working with a man in Germany and could not stop hearing marching music. When she told him, he'd gone pale. His father had been in the German Army under Hitler and had tried to make him grow up military, too, which he hadn't. All through his childhood, his father had played marching music. As to voodoo, Molra simply said: "I don't feel comfortable with all the fear stuff."

When I thought of Ed I had to agree—or, for that matter, Mr. M, who kept trying to scare Nathan by telling him that somebody wanted him dead. But I don't blame voodoo for that. I blame fear. As a white prostitute in Lafayette put it to

me: "That voodoo can only get to you if you let it get to you. It's all about makin' your mind turn in on itself."

And that is another difference between a faith healer and a doctor: a doctor may be unfeeling, incompetent, or even cruel, but most patients do not fear that he'll deliberately make them ill. When you deal with spirits, however, it's a two-way street.

BULLSHIT

The Haitian voodoo man, who was 27, led me into a cement room that smelled faintly like a slaughterhouse. Looking down, I saw bloodstains on the floor. Someone had painted a cross on the wall using blood. There was a huge cross with a hat on top and a hat on each arm, a great knife driven into its heart. On the altar in an adjoining room, the narrow black face of Ezulle, the goddess of love, lived in a white bonnet.

The young voodoo man said: "The place that you go to, they don't show things like that on this side. For this place they have to have the power to kill, and all that." I didn't understand what he said. He poured some pale rum on the floor.

A skinny pretty girl sat beside him. Her name was Marie, and she claimed to have paid him \$3,000 to treat her for sickness (although she was so obviously dirt-poor that it was hard to imagine her ever having \$300, and she was cured but had stayed on in that hot, almost empty place which had only one bed so possibly she paid in other ways); she kept announcing that the spirits had to have money before they'd come. It wasn't the voodoo man who needed the money, but the spirit. "Lay your money down," he said.

"He's good, 'cause I was sick," Marie was saying. "I was paralyzed."

"Is he your boyfriend?"

"No."

"Why didn't you ask your boyfriend for help, or your mother or your father?"

"Because they're the ones who hurt you," she said levelly.

After long and tiresome negotiations, I threw a \$100 bill onto the floor. This was always how it was, that these souls possessed with spirits, who might have told me what the meaning of life was, had nothing but money on their brains. Wherever I was, be it Pastor Brown's gospel church or some Cuban botanica, one had to put one's money where one's mouth or soul or praying hands were.

"Why do you want to know about voodoo?" the young man asked.

"So that the spirits can protect me from violence."

"Cut the cards. Now turn up three cards. What's your name?"

"William."

"Mr. William, you got something always stop you. Your head is not in position. You discussing something all by yourself. There is a woman. Who is the woman for you?"

"I don't know," I said. "There could be several possibilities."

"He says there's just one here," Marie told me, "but he's gonna find the others. He says: 'Where your friends got killed?'"

"Bosnia."

"Bosna? There's a place called Bosna?"

"Yes."

"When you go there, you go to report?"
 "Yes. To find out why people fight."
 "Why you go over there?"
 "Because I have a good brain and I want to help people. Maybe I can learn how to guard against violence."

Marie looked me in the face. "He says this why you have something stopping you."

The man began to chant to the spirit. He asked my religion and the name of my God.

"He says if you're Protestant the spirit will never help you. You have to find the spirits to help you." I said nothing.

The young voodoo man asked again: "In your country, what is your God?" For him this was not my country. This room of this house was Haiti.

"My God is God," I said.

"How you want to win the war?"

"It's up to you."

He held a bottle wrapped round by a thick knotted strip of cloth. There were weird pale things inside like pickled ears. "By yourself you cannot do it," he said.

"No one else cares," I explained.

"What kind of protection do you want?" he asked. It always seemed to come to that. It always got personalized.

"Something so that I won't die by violence," I said.

"He said, he will give you something like this shawl and something to drink. For two thousand," Marie translated. Half you give him before, and when you see nothing happen when they shoot, then you pay him the other half."

"I'll think about it," I said.

When we were outside, the taxi driver said to me: "Bullshit. He is total bullshit."

"Yep," I said.

"THEY FIND THEIR OWN SOLUTION"

The taxi driver took me to a different, very powerful voodoo man who, the story goes, had been detained by the U.S. government on account of possessing bad papers, so he invoked the spirits and disappeared from custody. The man said to me: "You came to learn the magic, and control the magic. *Pour apprendre la magie et pour contrôler la magie.*" He stretched out his arms. In a deep voice, he cried: "When you doing, you gotta get enough pressure." He swayed. The smell of cologne was all around. His face closed. "You work with the group," he said coldly. "And the group sent you to learn something about magic."

"That's true," I admitted. I thought that this voodoo man wouldn't want to deal with me any further after divining that I worked for "the group," but it wasn't quite the end. "You want to learn something," he muttered. "You want the protection. You pass some voodoo place already, but it wasn't right." (And here I want to say that I had told him nothing before paying him the \$77 and that, as far as I was aware, the taxi driver had told him nothing, although one never knows.)

He took my arm, raised it up, and tapped it. He had me make a fist. (And here I need to say that about 20 minutes afterward, when the taxi driver and I were rolling through Little Haiti, I began to get

(continued on page 205)

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From Brighton to Broadway,
Pete Townshend has leaped,
windmilled, and power-
chorded his way into the mind
of a generation or two.
Celia Farber visits the great man.

It's getting late. Pete Townshend cups his hands to his mouth and shouts to the bartender: "Could you turn the music up a little louder, please?" The bartender obeys and Townshend resumes bobbing his head to "Glory" by Television. Tom Verlaine croons, "When I see the glory / I ain't got a worry..."

It's the spring of 1993, and Townshend is holding court at Raoul's in downtown Manhattan a few days after the Broadway adaptation of his 1969 rock opera, *Tommy*, won six Tony Awards, including Best Original Score. The cast members flutter around Townshend like children whose father has finally come home. He hugs each one, asking questions about their lives and families. Then they all burst into the chorus of a number from *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. A waiter places a martini in front of Townshend but he ignores it, swaying back and forth. The drinks on the table start to slosh. "Could you turn it up, please?" he yells again. Somebody at the table goes to talk to the bartender, who turns the volume up some more. Townshend looks up and shouts, "Louder!" Smiling

Pete

now, and swinging his head, he looks blissfully happy. Then, as if he were pleading for his very life, he looks up one more time and screams, "Louder!" The bartender looks at Townshend helplessly and shrugs. Townshend beats the table now, and cries again, "Louder! Louder!" The man who seems to be a friend of his returns from the bar, puts his arm around him, and pleads, "Pete, it's as loud as it will go. It can't get any louder."

A few weeks later, after completing the last of three sold-out shows at New York's Beacon Theater, Townshend is signing copies of his latest album, *Psychodelicist*, at Tower Records. These days, Townshend's activities revolve mostly around the theater district. But here, autographing CDs, he's the Who's ageless rock'n'roll savior to scores of mostly disaffected, mostly down-to-earth thirtysomething males. It's almost 1:00 in the morning, on a balmy summer night. The line outside the packed record store stretches all the way down the block, around a corner, down the next block, and then turns yet another corner.

Six months later, Townshend and I are out walking. We stalk almost 40 blocks up a very deserted Broadway, late one freezing cold night, caught up in a storm of conversation. Three times, we're stopped, each time by a young man grinning from ear to ear. "Pete!" they each call out, as if running into an old friend. "Let me shake your hand!" And Townshend pulls his hand out of his coat pocket, claps it into the fan's, nods a greeting, and walks on.

No question: The relationship between Pete Townshend and his audience is unique in rock sociology. Townshend fans (and we know who we are) carry tribal convictions rooted in the grandiose, fractured, and failing ideology of underground heroics. We go through life with French horns tingling in our heads, signaling a call to arms for battles both real and imagined. We never seem to get over whatever it is we can't seem to get over. And *Quadrophenia* is our favorite record.

This symbiosis between Townshend, his fans, and the press has always been a central theme of his songwriting. Townshend has long treated his audience with a sort of protopunk brutality, a dysfunctionality marked by a dissolution of boundaries; an interconnectedness that is simultaneously nurturing and demoting to ell parties; a dysfunctionality that strongly suggests family.

"My analytical process as a writer," Townshend explains from a mid-Manhattan hotel room, "is based on a control group of mods, five

boys and one girl from Shepard's Bush who came backstage to see me in the '60s and said, 'We love what you do and you must go on doing it.' To this day my work is 80 percent what I think that group wants me to say and 20 percent whatever froths up."

What was it about those six people that made such an impact?

"After the Who put out 'I Can't Explain,' we did a show at the Goldhawk. Irish Jack, who led the mod delegation, said, 'This song is great.' I thought they meant they liked the song, so I said, 'Good, thanks.' And they said, 'No, we really like the song.' It was kind of like, 'I love you. No, you don't understand, I really love you.' So I said, 'What are you trying to say?' And Jack said, 'That's it! 'I Can't Explain' is about how we can't explain what we want to say. And that's what you've done.' I was really charged by that, both charged with the duty to write for them, but also charged up by it. I thought, fucking hell, this is great. Through a little teenybopper pop song—you know, I'm in love with you but I can't explain—I hit on something far deeper. The music triggers something very private the fans already know about themselves. I don't think I'm unique in this respect. I just share inadequacies, unease, and insecurities until I find yours. I try to universalize my idea of the incomplete fractured human being."

Townshend's "fractured human being" could well be described as the Ur-persona of rock itself. From Jimmy the Mod to Kurt Cobain, this figure offers momentary salvation by electrifying the cracks in his soul we recognize as our own. But Townshend has also had to come to grips with the fact that this, like any relationship, is part romantic projection, part disappointment.

"I've gone through periods where I've really despised the rock audience," he admits, "for its lack of imagination and passion, and for its complacency. You know: Just go out and play the same old things, set off a few firebombs, and we'll be happy. We're all too drunk and stoned to know the difference anyway. Just as long as you smesh your guitar, Pete, that's fine." Also their complicity in the death of stars that they profess to worship, idealize, and idolize. Those things make me very angry. But one of the first smart things I ever said about rock'n'roll was that the Who was a band that reflected its audience. The problem I have now is that I mustn't be a hypocrite. I did what I did, I said what I said."

The past few years have been transitional for Townshend. Whether you approve or not, he's metamorphosed from Pete Townshend, Who leader, to Pete Townshend, multimedia ingenue. His recent projects include stage and animated versions of *Ironman*, a collaboration with Britain's post laureate Ted Hughes; last year's four-CD Who box set; an upcoming greatest hits package, and an MCA overhaul of the Who's entire catalog. *Live at Leeds*, widely considered one of the best live albums ever released, was recently remixed and rereleased in extended form, by MCA, which is also planning to remaster *Who's Next*, *The Who Sell Out*, *A Quick One, Tommy*, *Quadrophenia*, *Who Are You*, and *Odds and Sods*. In 1993, *Tommy* was staged on Broadway and became an instant box-office smash. Two years later, it's still going strong and has recently begun a national tour. But many purist Who fans have grumbled that Townshend should never have surrendered his complex story of the autistic boy turned pinball messiah to the spectacle of Broadway.

The *Tommy* on Broadway controversy is not the first time Townshend stands accused of compromise. Having once epitomized the rebellious guitar hero, he has since had to spend a lot of time apologizing for having the same genetic make-up as the rest of it. It is as though, because he once wrote that one toss-off line "I hope I die before I get old," his public literally expects him not to age. Or, if he must age, not to change his sonic aesthetic at all, half-deaf or not. Most Who fans have their cutoff point: The more truly hip they are, the earlier the cutoff point. The early Who's sonic radicalism, all agree, created a paradigm of sound. But when Townshend's solo ventures became increasingly polished, many fans experienced a sense of disappointment. They seem to demand that he stay put within the very narrow parameters of rock mythology.

"People send me demos all the time and I listen to a lot of them. But I'm not here to show off my knowledge of indie rock bands. There's no point in me pretending to be a rock'n'roll radical when I'm not part of that anymore," he says. "I have fucking answers


(continued on page 212)

"Don't tell me that because I'm a rock star I can't have values, or that because I'm nearly 50 years old, I can't do this or that. 'I'm in charge.'"

The Who circa 1966, clockwise from top left: Roger Daltrey, Keith Moon, Pete Townshend, and John Entwistle.







Is rave dead? While
doomsayers scribe its
obit, techno neophyte
Dennis Cooper, along
with rave aficionado Joel
Westendorf, travels the
globe and finds that
reports of its death have
been greatly exaggerated.

over RIP Through it

Even if you haven't read *On the Road*, you probably know the story of Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady's semi-mythical road trip. If you don't know the story, suffice to say it took place in the 1950s, a time of political conservatism and pervasive emotional and sexual repression. These two future Beat icons set off in search of what they believed was the real, if temporarily confused, America, a place of unlimited

hope and big, wild dreams.

Well, this is that kind of story. Except our wanderlust hasn't been fueled by jazz, booze, and the prismatic beauty of free verse poetry. Instead, it's stoked by rave's dreamy, experimental music and almost crazily sweet ideology. We're heading into a more fucked-up America, with even more blind faith than the Beats could ever imagine.

Our rental car is zipping through the huge blur of desert between Palm Springs and the eastern California border. Somewhere beyond the desert's bleak and scalding horizon is Flagstaff, Arizona, site of the World Youth Festival, billed as a weeklong United Nations-sponsored showcase for indigenous cultures from around the world. We're targeting one of the festival's sub-events, a four-day Mega-Rave that has been the talk of rave aficionados since it popped up on the Internet last spring. Supposedly organized by the Zippies, a relentlessly self-hyping gaggle of middle-aged English rave promoters, it promises to do for ravers what the original Woodstock did for the hippie set, namely crystallize an underground movement, magnetize a thus far indifferent media, and give the already converted an incredible time.

The two of us are friends, but we come from very different backgrounds. One (Dennis) was rudely awakened from childhood when an older friend played him *The Velvet Underground* and *Nico*, and his musical taste has evolved along alternative rock lines ever since. The other (Joel), almost 20 years younger, grew up addicted to soul and R&B, but with enough interest in New Age music to spend his Sundays with a syndicated radio program called "Musical Starstreams." Still, he only fell in love when electronics married tribal rhythms in the sprawling genre dubbed techno. To Dennis, dance music is little more than a form of mass hypnosis. To Joel, rock'n'roll has grown unchallenging and obvious, and Stone Temple Pilots have a cuter feel than Sonic Youth. Point is, we're plunging into rave culture with mixed feelings.

To read published reports in magazines such as *Details* and *Option*, you'd think rave was already dead in its crib, a victim of its proponents' drug-induced befuddlement, and of inter-scene squabbles over what constitutes a pure rave experience. But that contradicts everything we've seen and felt over the past four months, as we crisscrossed the western United States and visited rave's hothouse, London. Dennis, whose limited scene experience and indie-rock bent makes him something of a rave couch potato, is feeling a number of countercultural hope that he hasn't felt since the early days of punk. Joel's identity has already been shaped by his immersion in rave culture, and he talks excitedly about his and his friends' intentions to infect the world with their wide-eyed enthusiasm.

So what is rave exactly? Well, it's hard to explain. You might think back to the mid-'70s, or even further back to the late-'60s, in the sense that, like punk and hippiedom, rave is a countercultural movement with specific musical taste, a highly developed fashion sense, and a left-of-Democratic politic. But unlike punks or hippies, ravers are more interested in issues of spiritual growth and increased communication than they are in transgressing traditional political structures. To generalize—and with a movement this amorphous, you're forced to—ravers tend to see the government and its laws as beside the point. If ravers lionize anything, it's technology, which offers ways to circumvent the kinds of blockage that derailed countercultures of the past. Rave is not about destroying corrupt power structures; it's about general things like self-belief, open-mindedness, and faith. It's about seeking the limitless. Hippies and punks named their enemies, which helped the media define them. They had specific goals, and when these goals weren't met, their movements were easily debunked. Ravers have no particular enemies, so they're relatively invisible. And their invisibility is their strength.

Rave is nothing particularly new. In England, the movement has been barreling along since 1987 or before. But in America, where the media tends to grab, misread, and gentrify every passing trend at birth, rave has somehow managed to grow in popularity and mutate aesthetically for a number of years now, with only the occasional sidelong glance from MTV and the rock music press. *Wired* and *Mondo 2000* have done their share of profiles, but, even there, coverage has been light, slanted to suit the magazines' technological themes, and bemusedly parental in tone. Then there are arti-

cies like the feature in *Details*, which quoted a few disgruntled fans and promoters, then declared the L.A. rave scene a dead duck.

It's kind of ironic that Los Angeles's Millennium I, which quickly sold out its 8,000 tickets, happened just about the time that *Details* ran its funeral oratory. Organized by local promoters to meet the speculations of film director Kathryn Bigelow, whose movie *Strange Days* required a huge New Year's Eve 1999 party scene, Millennium I was the exact opposite of an illegal underground party. Heavily advertised on local radio, its location in the streets of downtown Los Angeles required governmental support and massive police protection, which in turn severely curtailed attendees' drug use. A blocked-off intersection at the base of the Bonaventure Hotel became an immense, cross-shaped dance floor, blindingly ill for the cameras, constantly sprayed with confetti, and surrounded by actors dressed as machine gun-toting National Guardsmen. The rave itself could easily have been dwarfed or coopted by the moviemakers' designs and equipment. Instead they just seemed surreal, a kind of visual drug substitute that meshed surprisingly well with the sound of techno echoing wildly through the skyscrapers. Millennium I felt like a rave invasion. The ecstatic quality of the dancing that night had nothing to do with ecstasy per se, and everything to do with having finally won a long, uphill battle.

Rave is not about destroying corrupt power structures; it's about seeking the limitless.

So we've made it to Flagstaff. Unlike the bulk of Arizona, which is culturally erid and politically inhospitable, Flagstaff is a pretty little college town buried in the woods about 80 miles from the Grand Canyon's southern rim. Deep in its historic downtown section, currently a scaffold-covered eyesore parway through a Disneyland-style "restoration" project, is the office of the World Youth Festival. Occupying a room on the second floor of an artists' co-op building, its pininess is the first sign that we might be in for a letdown. In the doorway stands a short, balding hippie type, clearly stoned and obviously more than a little stressed out. Behind him several phones ring, ring, ring. He's staring forlornly out a dusty window, but when he spots us, he simultaneously stiffens and breaks into a shit-eating grin.

It seems the festival, scheduled to begin today, is siteless at the moment, not to mention long abandoned by the United Nations. The original site, near the Canyon, was never officially okayed. The second site, on a nearby Indian reservation, was yanked just two days ago when tribal leaders realized the scale of the planned event. But there's a chance, he says, that a local hippie commune, the Turtle Family, might donate part of its property, although he's not advising people to head on up there just yet since the roads to the commune are currently blocked off by police and their drug-sniffing dogs. "Check back later this afternoon," he tells us. Uh, will do. But in

TOP: KINO VILLAND; BOTTOM: DAVID SWINGELLS





the meantime, how do we get in touch with the Zippies? He looks at us blankly. You know, the people who are organizing the Mega-Rave? His bloodshot eyes widen. "The... what?"

On the street, we buy a local newspaper. Sure enough, its front page is a multipart article detailing the festival organizers' incompetence. There are several pictures of dispondant out-of-towners slouched in front of local businesses and wandering the streets. We drive around the city, blasting techno, the place a sea of lost festival-goers. Every once in a while, a car will pass ours, also blasting techno, and hopeful squints are exchanged. Plastikman is in the tape deck. Joel is dancing in his seat, head flicking back and forth, his hands raised, fingers slicing at the air. Dennis is constitutionally unsuited to dancing, but he's all ears. Plastikman, a project of a young Canadian named Rickie Hewitt, uses a speedy, rolling tick-tock beat overlaid with spare, shredded-sounding synthesizer textures. It sounds a bit like straw feels. Cracky.

We stop into what appears to be Flagstaff's two hippast CD stores: neither of the shop's clerks have heard anything about a Mega-Rave, and don't seem particularly interested in the prospect. So we give up for the moment and check into a hotel, lug our clothes and tapes inside, and settle in for what looks to be a very long week. The Mega-Rave is scheduled to commence two days from now, so all is not lost quite yet. Still, when we call the Festival office later in the afternoon, the phones have been disconnected, and we reluctantly begin studying the hotel's *Tourist Guide*.

Dennis is pissed. He's used to the rock world's professionalism. After all, rock'n'roll has had decades to organize. But Joel is just a little bit disappointed. He scrunches his face up, and gleans into space for a couple of minutes. Then he's his cheery young self again, leaning over a road map, calculating the distance from here to the town of Sedone, supposedly a site of great spiritual energy. Apparently, fuck-ups like this aren't uncommon in rave culture. Maybe now just isn't the time for a Mega-Rave. Maybe the culture is still too chaotic and lively to get that in focus. So in a way it's a positive thing, eyes on the future and all that. Dennis wonders if Joel's in denial or something. Then he thinks about Woodstock, and how much more interesting '70s rock might have been without that overrated signpost. If nothing else, we might have been spared Ten Years After.

Earlier in the summer we separately attended two rave-related events, one of which piqued Dennis's interest, the other of which confirmed Joel's hopes.

Narnia is the closest thing rave culture has to a Lollapalooza. This yearly rave, always held in some unannounced location in California, has a reputation for being the most elaborate and professional event in the country. Named after a series of novels by C.S. Lewis, it promises a veritable dream world: seven different "lands," one to suit attendees' every possible mood,

from an ambient area for relaxing between dance spurts, to a special effects-thrashed area featuring the hardest techno beats. Dennis, being the novice of this duo, figured Narnia was the perfect place to begin.

Narnia, near San Diego, California: At first I don't know where I am. Then my eyes adjust and the place gets real. I'm at the entrance of an abandoned quarry. A dozen huge mounds of gravel and dirt have gradually weathered into a mini-mountain range, creating a series of isolated valleys connected by winding trails. The antireity is lit up in blurry purples, reds, and yellows, and crisscrossed by thousands of vibrating laser beams coming from all directions. They rise and fall every couple of seconds like a thatched lid. Passing through them, I'm bombarded by a confusion of sounds—a soft, meandering whir from a small gravel pit over to my left; some old-fashioned hip hop blasting from a big tin shed over the hill to my right; acid jazz apparently being played live at some spot in the distance; and, overwhelming them all, the thud-thud-thud and squeak-squeak-squeak of techno pounding from the valley below me.

I wander around, following the little trails from gravel pit to gravel pit. The ambient area has a sleepy, campfire atmosphere. People are crunched up in sleeping bags, talking and passing joints. Up and over the hill is the acid jazz area. A band plays on an unit stage, but most of the listeners are gathered at a series of booths along the pit's opposite wall. One booth offers face painting. Greenpeace mans another. Two booths sell legal faux ecstasy pills made from ephedra root, ginseng, and other herbs. I buy a few, then take the first trail I find into a pit full of stuttering white light. The music sounds like a skipping CD. There are several hundred stiffened bodies of indeterminate gender vibrating on their feet in a clump. They look like they're being electrocuted. I'm out of here, and over the hill. Which brings me back to techno.

This is obviously Narnia's main attraction. It's easily four times larger than the other pits, and ringed by a long, narrow, curving stage full of drums, gongs, speaker cabinets, and several mixing desks. Above the stage hangs a five-story screen, upon which lasers, slides, and Super-8 movie loops battle it out at such a high speed that it's impossible to pick out the imagery. All around me, thousands of people dance, grin, and stargaze at the same time. Most of them look very high, but there's not a beer can or bottle to be seen, which may be the most disorienting detail of all. Teenagers and people in their 20s predominate, but there is a fair number of us older types, and, unlike at a rock gig, I can't immediately peg them as record company employees. The male-to-female ratio is about 60:40. Clothes are loose, colorful, and designer casual. Hairstyles vary from hippie-esque to shaved.

It's strange how seductive the music becomes in this setting, even to these rockists' ears. Songs parade by, crossfading almost unnoticeably, like individual movements in some vast, night-long symphony. I stand around for a while, kind of weak in the knees, craning my neck, trying to decide if it's the most otherworldly sight I've ever seen, or acid anyway. Everybody looks intensely self-involved. Their sleek, unreadable expressions give the scene its only meaning, though I'm not exactly sure what it means. They just move around in tight little areas, mesmerized by their surroundings, oblivious to but seemingly respectful of their neighbors. One woman is dressed as a butterfly. Another guy is wearing a spacesuit. Sometimes they're in sharp silhouette. Sometimes, when the light show cooperates, they're so garishly lit you'd think they were paid entertainers.

They're amazing to watch, better than a band, maybe because they're just a slightly more extroverted fraction of the rest of us—kind of rave focus group in whose galloping bodies and dalirious expressions it's actually possible to see pure, unmitigated happiness, like the kind cartoon characters feel. The music speeds up, slows down, speeds up. The light show flutters through its insane narrative. And I leave, fried, around 4:00 a.m., pissed at myself for being such a wellflower, and wondering why my friends and I are so unwilling to really and truly relax.

2PAC

ME
AGAINST
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Joel, whose previous rave experience gives him more access to the subtleties, chose the Rainbow Gathering, again an annual event, this year held a couple of hours south of Yellowstone Park. The Gathering, whose existence long predates rave, has traditionally been a kind of week-long camp-out and convocation for hippies and Deadheads, but it's become a popular place for ravers to meet and exchange ideas about the future of their movement.

The Rainbow Gathering, Wyoming: Last year the 23rd annual Rainbow Gathering took place among the hills, meadows, and forests of the Bridger-Teton National Forest in Western Wyoming. It's about 45 minutes from the only thing close to civilization, a town called Big Piney, whose population I'd estimate at about 550.

The Gathering has always been an annual retreat for hippies, counter-culture advocates, and nature lovers. But recently it's begun to draw some of the earthier members of the American rave movement, myself included. In fact this year the Zippies made the event even more appealing by scheduling one of their parties just adjacent to the Gathering. True to form, they wind up arriving at the site too late to entertain anyone but the stragglers. Nevertheless, at its height, almost 15,000 people are in attendance.

Like a rave, the Rainbow Gathering involves so many sights, sounds, and activities that it's difficult to experience them all. I've been here for five of its scheduled seven days, and I'm far from exhausting it. We live in camps, each of which has its own kitchen serving everchanging meals. Food is cooked in clay ovens that are constructed from materials gathered on site. There have been group discussions on religion, relationships, philosophy, politics, and issues relative to the Gathering itself. Attendees craft candles, pottery, weavings, and carvings. In an area my friends and I have dubbed the Rainbow Spa and Salon, you have the option of bathing or having your hair washed in solar-heated water. Showers are available, but someone has to hold the hose for you.

Alongside the physical similarities between the Gathering and a standard rave, there's the everpresent rhythm that characterizes them both. It doesn't matter whether it's 140 beats per minute with laser accompaniment, or 10 to 50 flame-lit drummers in the middle of a two-hour, fireside percussion marathon—you develop an intense relationship to the rhythm. At raves, from the moment you arrive until your exhausted departure, you are surrounded by the beat. At the Rainbow Gathering, you fall asleep and wake up to drumming. The universal rhythm is constant.

But there are differences between the Gathering and a rave, especially in the attitude toward technology. Many Rainbow family members take pride in their shunning of the technological advances of contemporary culture. Some consider them aspects of "Babylon," a term they frequently use to disparage modern-day society. While it's certainly admirable to live without relying on the sometimes destructive advances wrought by science and chemistry, it makes me sad to think of the limitations these people could be placing on themselves. Maybe by consciously ignoring the outside world they've managed to achieve an ignorant bliss, but they're also missing out on the limitless possibilities that technology



affords, and which inspire so much hope in ravers.

Thankfully, most Rainbow Gatherers, whatever their beliefs, are here for a greater purpose. The Gathering is a break in time, an opportunity to enjoy what the earth has to offer outside the world of the manmade. If there's a message here, it's a simple one, and it applies to hippies and ravers alike: We must use modern life to keep these natural spirits alive, and make room for the unknown spirits that await us.

London, England: It's several months later and we're in a London hotel fighting off jetlag's weird high. Maybe we can pick up some pointers from these raver oldtimers. Rave was born here. Actually, if you want to get technical about it, rave was probably born in Chicago on the day Genesis P-Orridge of Psychic TV noticed a record-store bin marked "Acid House," and mistakenly thought it meant acid as in LSD—it really meant acid as in the corrosive liquid. Anyway, P-Orridge took a slew of these records home to London, and, when the music wasn't as wild as the tag had implied, he set out to record what he'd heard in his daydreams. This new tweaked-out, vaguely psychedelic dance music sounded stunning on ecstasy, the drug of choice among trendy young Londoners. And it was extremely influential in both the rock and dance scenes, which have been traditionally less separatist than those in the States. When club DJs started adding this new acid house to their playlists, and rock bands like Happy Mondays, Stone Roses, and Charlatans ran with the ball, they kick-started a musical genre that would eventually filter overseas and lead people like ourselves starry-eyed to the source.

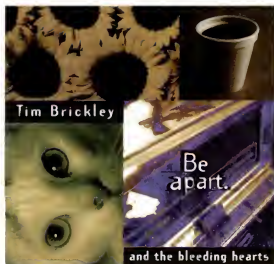
We'd heard rave was essentially dead in England. As far as we can tell, it is and it isn't. Certainly English rave has gentrified over the last few years. Walking down Camden High Street—a kind of scruffier Melrose—techno blasts from most storefronts. On TV, corporate advertisers like Coca-Cola and Hyundai use it to audio-wrap their products. Even the BBC—establishment central—intros and outros their newscasts with weakling techno instrumentals.

What is all but dead are the large, illegal outdoor events that were British rave culture's early meat and potatoes. The government here is famous for its semi-fascism toward countercultural behavior, and ravers appear to be its current enemy number one. The Criminal Justice Bill, aimed in part at eliminating rave from the landscape, became law at the end of last year despite protests and demonstrations. The bill allows police to shut down any public gathering of more than a couple dozen people.

And there are serious problems within the scene itself. Just a month before our arrival, a young Scottish raver was sold some bad ecstasy and was literally cooked alive on an Edinburgh dance floor, inspiring the hysteria-prone English tabloids to call for a crackdown and instigating a fierce debate within the pages of rave-oriented magazines such as *Mixmag* (e.g., "Do we need to begin self-policing our drug use?").

Chris Campion, a London-based freelance writer, is a friend of a friend of Joel's. One night early in our visit, he offers to guide us through Megatropolis, a weekly indoor rave hosted by Heaven, one of the city's

[\(continued on page 211\)](#)



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AIDS

words from the front



In early 1991, an internal memo was circulated to the Labor and Delivery staff of Bronx Municipal Hospital in New York alerting them of a group of patients whose babies would be delivered under very unusual circumstances. The women in question were referred to as "076" patients, meaning that they were taking part in a government study called ACTG 076 (AIDS Clinical Trials Group 076), which tested the effect of AZT on maternal transmission of HIV.

From the very start, the study was fraught with controversy. It violated the most fundamental tenet of prenatal care, namely that pregnant women should avoid all medication during fetal development—particularly medications that had been demonstrated to be unsafe to the fetus.

But in this case, the women were HIV-positive, and all such concerns were abandoned for the higher purpose of combating HIV infection. The 477 HIV-positive women were divided into two groups. One group was given a placebo beginning sometime during the second trimester of pregnancy, which continued throughout labor and delivery, and was then given to their infants for six weeks after birth. The other group was given the AIDS drug AZT, initially intended for use as a chemotherapy in the '60s, but abandoned

AZT made a public relations comeback last year, after a new study declared its effectiveness in halting the transmission of HIV from mother to child. But how accurate was the data? And what is the long-term risk to both mother and child? Celia Farber sifts through the fallout.

because it was determined in the lab to be not only ineffective but too toxic for use in humans.

AZT had been proven to have both carcinogenic and mildly mutagenic effects when given to lab animals in high, prolonged doses. The drug had also caused vaginal cancers in rodents. And the evidence that it had any power to reduce viral transmission of HIV was conflicting. While several studies had shown that AZT could reduce viral transmission of other animal viruses, it had a disappointing effect on HIV. Out of 17 mice dosed with AZT and then injected with HIV, all 17 immediately tested HIV-negative, but after two weeks became HIV-positive.

The safety data in humans was also conflict-

ing. While many women had delivered babies with no obvious birth defects, despite taking AZT during pregnancy, there were also some curious complications—but were they due to AZT? The matter is clouded by the difficulty of determining which adverse effects are due to "HIV infection," which to drug use, which to pregnancy itself or genetics, and which to AZT toxicity.

The focus of the toxicity question is on birth defects and complications at the time of birth. What remains totally unknown is what the long-term complications of AZT may be, both for women and for babies exposed in utero and after birth. What we have at this time is fragmentary, transient information, combined with "anecdotal" reports from women who have direct experience

with this drug. While we do not intend to be alarmist or sensationalist in our approach, we feel strongly that there must be dialogue about this very controversial study.

Medical authorities are near unanimous in their support of ACTG 076, which concluded that AZT reduces maternal transmission by 67 percent.

They only regret that the "compliance rate" of pregnant HIV-positive women agreeing to take AZT is too low. Global policymakers are eagerly strategizing ways to introduce a cheap analogue of AZT to all pregnant HIV-positive women in the third world in an all-out effort to halt maternal transmission of HIV. AZT will not halt it. At best, it will reduce it. But as Laurie Garrett pointed out in a recent article in *New York Newsday*, doctors in the third world generally don't know which women are HIV-positive and which are not. "They would have no choice," Garrett writes, "but to treat all women in labor with the chemical."

These extreme proposals are based on a single study, cosponsored by AZT's maker,

Burroughs Wellcome, and the U.S. government. Both have a history of making false claims for a drug that was never very good to begin with.

In order to glean the truth about AZT, one has to be extremely vigilant and follow the twists and turns of the medical literature closely. Otherwise, one's health is at the mercy of what is essentially a public relations campaign for a product—just like any other. We have no doubt that most medical professionals want the best for their patients. But having been out on the streets for months, listening to the unheard voices of the women and activists who are involved in 076, one thing became very clear—far from being the first beacon of light in the history of AIDS, the results of ACTG 076 have triggered a series of extreme social measures that many women are worried about.

While this is being presented as a "question of choice," in reality, it is not. The more poor, afraid, ill-informed, and disempowered a woman is, the less of an "informed choice" she will have. We decided to look at the other side of the 076 popular mythology, propagated uncritically by the media—and to listen to some of the unheard voices.

Though AZT is widely claimed to have been deemed "safe" in pregnant women, in fact, the FDA did not think so and never allowed pregnant women to take it prior to this study, primarily because it was classified as mutagenic. Another mutagenic drug, Thalidomide, was prescribed as a sedative throughout Great Britain and Germany in the 1950s but was never approved in the U.S. Thalidomide was responsible for over 10,000 birth defects in children born to mothers who had taken the drug during gestation. Many of the infants were born with missing or partially missing limbs. From that point on, no potentially mutagenic chemical was to be taken by pregnant women, for any reason. AZT in pregnant women represents a radical break in this tradition.

In January of 1991, even before recruiting for ACTG 076 began, "Clinical Experience" data became available on 41 babies born to women who had taken AZT during pregnancy. Among the 41, there were two delivered preterm, two "small for gestational age," and one case of decreased amniotic fluid. Complete blood work was done on 27 infants. Of those, six had low red blood cell counts. There were two birth defects: One had extra digits on both hands and a heart defect, and the second had extra digits on both hands. The report concluded that neither case of birth defects was directly related to the AZT therapy.

Dr. Lynne Mofenson, who coauthored the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) recommendations on the use of AZT for pregnant women and is chair of the U.S. Public Health Service Task Force, told SPIN that the extra digits were a genetic trait in both of the families where it occurred. So-called "malformations" occur naturally in the population at a rate of roughly one in one hundred.

In the ACTG memo, blood toxicity was listed to be "of concern." And finally, the report stated that

AZT "may harm both neurological and neurodevelopment of the fetus and newborn as brain growth and development continues through the second year of life." AZT was listed by the FDA as a drug "in which safety in human pregnancies has not been determined."

Despite this dark cloud of potential future danger, ACTG 076 forged ahead, recruiting HIV-positive pregnant women across the country and in France. The first listed objective was to see whether AZT could reduce transmission of HIV from mother to child. The second was to determine whether AZT was "safe" for mother and child. The third was to assess the safety and tolerance of AZT when given to newborns from birth to six weeks of age.

In February of 1994, an interim analysis of ACTG 076 was released stating that AZT "sub-

stantially reduced" mother-to-child transmission of HIV—that 13 babies in the AZT group out of 180, versus 40 out of 184 in the placebo group, had gotten HIV from their mothers. In a flash, the news was trumpeted across the nation, and AZT suddenly made a public relations comeback. As a direct result of this one study, AZT was approved for use in not only pregnant women, but also in newborns, which was unheard of previously. The study immediately drew emphatic support in the medical community, but today, one year later, a faint pitch of anxiety is rising. AZT does appear to reduce maternal transmission of HIV, but the question that haunts even some of its most ardent supporters is: at what price?

third world. The most extensive study of maternal transmission in the West planned the transmission rate to about 14 percent? Why, then, did the women of 076 in the placebo group transmit HIV at the unusually high rate of 25.5 percent? Maternal transmission clearly depends on factors like proper prenatal care, the mother's health, viral load, and disease progression at the time of birth, none of which were looked at in this study. AZT was presumed to be the only variable.

When the ACTG 076 study was designed, HIV-positive women were still being counseled by medical professionals to have abortions, and told that they had a slim chance of delivering a healthy baby. All children born to HIV-positive mothers are initially HIV-positive, but a full 75 to 93 percent in the West become HIV-negative when they develop their own immune systems.

Given the actual small percentage of children who remain HIV-positive after birth, the overwhelming majority of babies born to mothers given AZT during gestation will have been exposed to AZT for no reason.

"I am terrified of the long-term effects on these children," says Kathleen Nokes, a registered nurse who works with HIV/AIDS patients. "I do believe that AZT reduces maternal HIV transmission. But this is a drug given during fetal development. And what worries me is, we're treating at least 75 percent of these babies for something they never had and never will have with a highly toxic drug."

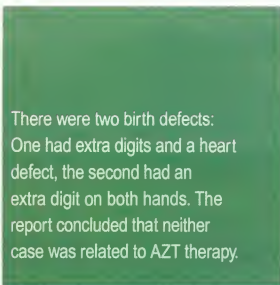
"What's to make us think there's not going to be a major price to pay down the road for giving AZT to these babies?" continues Nokes, who has been embroiled in the 076 controversy from the start and has emerged as one of the lone voices within the health care community sounding a warning against it.

"And I don't mean a minor price, I mean a major price. All I know is, this drug causes vaginal cancers in rodents. It is impacting the blood of these infants, causing abnormalities. The party line up to this point has been: 'Don't give pregnant women anything.' Especially coming off the Thalidomide study, which everyone in the United States still pats themselves on the back for."

The factor that is driving the medical community to such prenatal radicalism in this case is that the women are antibody positive to HIV. And HIV is still being marketed as a universally deadly virus, despite the fact that many long-term HIV-positive people who have no symptoms of AIDS are proving that notion wrong.

"The mind-set here," says Nokes, "is that these women shouldn't be getting pregnant anyway."

The controversial study, which was sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and its equivalent in France, began in April 1991. Enrollment was a problem from the beginning,



stantially reduced" mother-to-child transmission of HIV—that 13 babies in the AZT group out of 180, versus 40 out of 184 in the placebo group, had gotten HIV from their mothers. In a flash, the news was trumpeted across the nation, and AZT suddenly made a public relations comeback. As a direct result of this one study, AZT was approved for use in not only pregnant women, but also in newborns, which was unheard of previously. The study immediately drew emphatic support in the medical community, but today, one year later, a faint pitch of anxiety is rising. AZT does appear to reduce maternal transmission of HIV, but the question that haunts even some of its most ardent supporters is: at what price?

The crux of the issue is this: AZT is an extreme intervention, by any measure. To justify that extremity, as outlined by the FDA, the benefit would have to outweigh the risk by a broad margin. But in this case, it's questionable.

Studies in the industrialized world show that maternal transmission—with no help from AZT—ranges from as low as 7 percent up to about 25 percent, and as high as 40 percent in parts of the

**It was during the wake, after everyone was finished crying and
breaking things, that everyone agreed there was
only one thing to be done.**



Wilco A.M.

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as it is in many AZT studies because of the numerous concerns surrounding the drug. Only 477 HIV-positive women were recruited for the study, out of a planned intake of 748. Most of them, 80 percent, were minority women, ranging in age from 15 to 43; the median age was 25. The criteria for participation was that the women had to have more than 200 CD4-T-cells, no symptoms of AIDS, and have taken no AZT in the past. The women were recruited from fifty centers in the U.S. and nine in France.

The study was designed to be "double-blind," meaning that neither the participants nor the doctors were supposed to know who was getting AZT and who was getting placebo. But as in previous AZT studies it became clear from blood work who was on AZT and who was on placebo.

The women were started on an oral dose of AZT or placebo between the 14th and 34th week of pregnancy, then switched to an IV throughout labor and delivery; newborns were given a syrup for six weeks. The babies were tested for HIV at birth, and then at several intervals for what was supposed to be 18 months, but only 75 babies were tracked for the full period. ACTG 076, like previous AZT studies of its magnitude, was stopped short before it reached its original research goals; the majority of cases had been tracked for only six months or less when the news was released. This was another significant shortcoming of the study, since it can take 18 months or longer for true viral status to emerge. Nevertheless, when benefit was seen on the AZT side the study was suspended and all the women participating were offered AZT.

Almost overnight, the news was splashed across the world's media that AZT had now been proven to reduce mother to child transmission of HIV by 67 percent. This news was carried before any independent review board had gone over the data, and nine months before the study was published in a medical journal. The Pediatric AIDS Foundation announced that all HIV-infected women should be offered AZT, and that "lifelong treatment cannot be ethically denied because of ineffective HIV screening."

The results of ACTG 076 became a lightning rod for underlying political and social debates that were waiting to explode. As soon as the results were leaked, a fierce controversy over the ethics of mandatory HIV testing erupted, and legislation was proposed that would make pregnant women the first patient group ever subject to mandatory testing. ACTG 076 also became the central argument for unblinding test results, which are currently kept confidential. As soon as the interim analysis was announced, the head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Dr. Anthony Fauci, distributed a "clinic alert" about the findings through a computer network around the world.

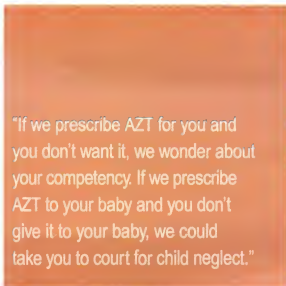
"They moved from research to 'standard care' so fast, that's the thing that has gotten me nuts," says Nokes. "And once it's standard care, if you're diabetic and I tell you to take insulin, you take it. If we prescribe AZT for you and you don't want it, we wonder about your competency. If we prescribe AZT to your baby, and you don't give

it to your baby, we could take you to court for child neglect."

This is the single greatest fear of the 076 critics. The relationship between mother, child, and state is complex and charged—076 further complicates the matter by providing a very tenuous gauge of responsible maternal behavior. Could women one day lose custody of their kids because they refused to give them the standard of care treatment for HIV, namely AZT?

Nokes adds, "If the mother's got any smarts, she'll say, 'I'm giving the kid AZT,' and then do what she damn well pleases. But the point is, in a newborn nursery the nurse is going to administer the medication that has been ordered. And that's exactly what is happening throughout the country right now, as a result of 076."

Malina Ricardo is an HIV-positive mother and a woman of color who is opposed to 076. Her five-year-old daughter has been HIV-positive



"If we prescribe AZT for you and you don't want it, we wonder about your competency. If we prescribe AZT to your baby and you don't give it to your baby, we could take you to court for child neglect."

since birth but remains completely healthy. The child is enrolled in a clinical drug trial involving AZT and another nucleoside analogue, ddI. But Ricardo, who is in the Community Constituency Group for ACTG 076, has for the past two years been flushing the medications down the toilet. "I don't give it to her. She was only sick when she was on those medications," says Ricardo, who is also healthy. "Now she is the only child in those studies that is prospering. The others are all withering away and many have died already."

"They called me from the NIH and said they wanted to fly us down there for some blood tests," Ricardo continues. "They think she's a miracle case, thanks to their drugs! I just hung up on them." NIH says no data is available yet on the study that Ricardo refers to.

Ricardo hasn't disclosed her little secret to the trial coordinators. "I'm waiting for the right moment, when the study is over," she says.

Sonia Alvarez thought she had won the virological lottery. At 23, she is already a mother of

three. Her oldest child is eight years old, and her youngest boy is seven months. Alvarez knew she was HIV-positive before she had any of the kids, and the two oldest grew up HIV-negative and healthy. But by the time she got pregnant with her third child, 076 was underway and she enrolled.

When she gave birth to a son, the future looked bright. The baby was HIV-negative and Alvarez was euphoric. She learned that she had been in the AZT arm of the trial, and she believed that that was why her baby "didn't get the virus." She was so emphatic about the new research breakthrough that she went to her local hospital, accompanied by her doctor, one of the investigators on 076, to speak to pregnant HIV-positive women about AZT and pregnancy. When confronted by AIDS activists who were opposed to the trial, she told them they were irresponsible for questioning its conclusions. "Women need this drug," she said. "This drug saved my baby." Still, she was happy when, six

weeks after he was born, she was allowed to stop giving him the medication. The baby had been breaking out in strange rashes and seemed lethargic and unresponsive. Then came the rude awakening.

Malina Ricardo ran into Alvarez in the waiting room of her daughter's clinic. "I said, 'Hey, how are you? How is your baby?'" says Ricardo. "And she burst into tears."

"I said, 'Honey, why are you crying?' And she said, 'My baby has turned HIV-positive.' " If all the babies were retested today, how many would be found to have seroreverted?

Terry Dugan does AIDS prevention research at Columbia Presbyterian HIV Center in New York. She is one of an increasing number of voices from within the medical community, mostly

women, who have a nagging sense of discomfort about this highly publicized study. "There is something that is not right about all this," she says. "There is too much of a focus on HIV and none on the whole environment that these women are coming out of."

Dugan recalls seeing children of women who were impoverished, malnourished, and often struggling with major drug addictions. "The HIV-negative kids were often just as sick as the HIV-positive ones," she says. "I'm just not sure I trust this data."

Long-term use of AZT, one of a class of drugs called nucleoside analogues, can cause sudden cellular changes that can lead to a vast array of complications, including bone marrow toxicity, organ dysfunction, muscle and tissue deterioration, anemia, and cancer. A disturbing example of the potential dangers of nucleoside analogues occurred in a federal trial testing the unapproved hepatitis drug FIAU. Five out of fifteen trial participants died due to complications that the trial

coordinators admit were almost certainly a direct result of the drug.

The "ethical considerations" of 076 are summarized in the ACTG staff memo as follows: "Although the long-term safety effects of ZDV (AZT) in adult women, pregnant women, and their offspring are unknown, the medical and social importance of developing strategies for primary prevention of HIV requires the conduct of a perinatal clinical trial prior to receipt of long-term safety data. It can be argued that any significant reduction of risk of transmitting HIV-infection to the fetus outweighs the currently perceived risk of administering ZDV therapy to pregnant women and their fetuses in a carefully monitored trial."

Mofenson says, "I agree that it's scary that we don't know what the long-term adverse effects of AZT may be, but it's clear from the data that the adverse effects so far have been very minimal whereas the banafits in terms of transmission have been tremendous."

While most OB-GYNs seem to view 076 as a great breakthrough and a long-awaited chance for HIV-positive women to have families, community representatives are concerned that there is not enough skepticism about the study. They point out that treatment policies with anonomous potential consequences were put in place based on a single study, and that in the zeal that followed the announcement, women are being pressured into taking AZT rather than given a choice.

Mary Lucey, an HIV-positive lesbian and member of ACT UP Los Angeles, calls 076 "an evil hoax." "You wouldn't believe the ramifications of this one study," says Lucey. "Not a series of studies. One study. People want to start mandatory testing of all these pregnant women, and putting these kids on drugs."

A study recently published in the *Lancet* suggests that other strategies may exist to reduce maternal transmission of HIV that are less dangerous than AZT, yet they remain largely unexplored. The study looked at vitamin A levels in women in Malawi who were HIV-positive and pregnant. Low vitamin A has been correlated with disease progression in HIV infection. Those with the lowest levels of vitamin A in the study transmitted HIV to their babies at a rate of 32.4 percent. Those with the highest levels of vitamin A had a transmission rate of only 7.2 percent, a figure lower even than the lowest figures for 076. Although vitamin A was not given to the women with the expressed purpose of reducing maternal transmission, it ought to be enough to suggest that nutrition is a major factor in both HIV transmission and disease progression.

In the absence of access to the full 076 data, AIDS activists are forced to sort through any evidence they can find. For instance, a CDC report states that there were no adverse effects of AZT in animal reproductive systems, either of female rats or their offspring, but points out that humans taking AZT for a long time have reported an increased incidence of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. "The long-term effects of ZDV [AZT] during pregnancy...are not known," the report concludes. Activists have been picking up anecdotal reports of tumors in AZT-treated children.

In their confusion, the women of 076 and others who have taken AZT during pregnancy have been contacting community activists with their stories.

"These are only anecdotal reports. This is not real science," warns Lucey. "But we know of one

developing cancers after 076," says Britton. "But the last time I spoke to her, she said that she felt it didn't matter whether it was the AZT causing it or not, because at this point she was dying and her child was dying."

Alice White, a spokesperson for Burroughs Wellcome, says, "We don't know what the long-term effects of AZT are, but this is a situation where you have to measure cost-benefit, and this is a case where there clearly is a benefit to taking AZT."

Back in the early '90s, when recruiting was still ongoing for this study, the whole debate seemed to degenerate into a PC shouting match. The pro-076 side called the critics "racist" because they were primarily white, and therefore didn't know what these mostly minority women's lives are really like. The anti-076 contingent considered it "racist" to use minority women as "guinea pigs," and to give women of color such a toxic drug to begin with. They also felt that the women being roped in by the 076 data were not really equipped to read and analyze all the scientific data. When asked whether she felt that women are being coerced into taking AZT, Mofenson said, "The reports that I hear from throughout the country are that women are asking for this drug—not that they're being coerced."

"Of course they're being coerced," says Lucey. "The consent form is eight pages long and basically says that if you don't take this, your baby is probably going to die. These women are going to read that first paragraph and say, 'Where do I sign?'"

Some data on the adverse effects of AZT is detailed in a pregnancy registry that documents birth defects in children whose mothers took AZT. This

information is reported on a voluntary basis from doctors directly to AZT's maker, Burroughs Wellcome. Although the complete pregnancy registry is not available to the media, SPIN was able to obtain an interim analysis from another source.

Data was collected in two groups. In the first group, doctors registered the women during their pregnancies, and then reported the outcomes following birth. In the other group, doctors submitted data on patients who had already given birth, making it more likely that problem cases would be registered while apparently normal births might not be reported. In the first group of 121 pregnancies, there were 8 abortions and 113 live births. Of those 113 births, there were 4 birth

(continued on page 214)



woman, she is a close friend actually, who was on 1200 milligrams of AZT when she was pregnant five years ago, and her daughter is having all kinds of problems. Her immune system is only functioning at 60 percent capacity. If she gets an ear infection, it takes her nine months to get over it. And now they've just removed a tumor from the girl's arm. The pediatrician said he had never seen a tumor like that on a child. And this girl is HIV-negative."

Darren Britton, editor of the newsletter *Cure AIDS!*, reports that one woman who had been in 076 and on AZT called him because her child, who was HIV-negative, had developed brain cancer and leukemia. "She wanted to know whether I knew any other kids who were negative and were

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P.J. HARVEY

To Bring You My Love
Island

10 "In my dreaming you'll be drowning," yowls Polly Harvey in the breakneck midnight ramble "Long Snake Moan." Harvey's oceanic imagination transforms her into a creature made supernatural by desire on *To Bring You My Love*, someone who can reveal the soul's dark, secret corners. Ever ready to invoke truly classic rock, she matches the Mephistophelean boast made by Bo Diddley in "Who Do You Love?" with this album's title track. But while Diddley's 47 miles of barbed wire represented his prowess, Harvey's stands for endurance. Facing down heaven and hell has taken her beyond her self; when she succumbs to the big, black monsoon of the next song, "Meet Ze Monsta," she simply joins her force to its own. The magnetic crawl of the fuzzed-out guitar in the title track breaks into bullet fire here, but Harvey's vocal stays deep-throated, at once sexual and beyond gender.

This one-two punch reveals exactly where Harvey wants to take us now: past the discomfort of being stuck in one identity—and one body—that *Dry* expressed; beyond the struggle to overcome the flesh that *Rid of Me* evoked. *To Bring You My Love* starts by abandoning such boundaries. In these songs, at least, there are no lines between masculine and feminine, human and divine. What remains is the pain and grace of having breached those divides in a world that relies on them to remain intact, and the challenge to consider what humanity might be like if we could get past them.

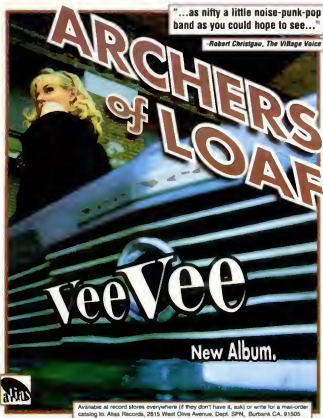
Wild creatures live inside each of us. They are the children of our desires, navigating Imagination. We don't know them well, these alien identities; we push them into hiding so we can go about our business, breaking free only when emotion disrupts normality's order—in pain, grief, ecstasy, desperate love. Harvey wants us to meet these monsters and hear them roar. She knows that rock'n'roll not only expresses but stimulates desire, and if you're hungry enough, it can (at least momentarily) break you apart. That's how Harvey uses it—to free the man in her, and the madwoman, the goddess and the ghost. While most of her peers graze pop culture's surfaces for inspiration, Harvey plunges under. She's bent on touching rock's magical core. There she uncovers a language grounded in the intuitive and mystical, an account of her own heroic journey. This may sound like so much Joseph Campbell to cynical hipsters, but it's one of rock's most vital traditions, crucial to the music of Elvis, mid-period Stones and Beatles, Al Green, Sly Stone, Patti Smith, Hüsker Dü, Sonic Youth—virtually all the greats.

To Bring You My Love proves beyond a doubt that P.J. Harvey is one of those greats. Thematically and stylistically consistent without sinking into self-cannibalization, the album continues along the path she forged with *Dry* and *Rid of Me*. But Harvey's chosen subject—the physical experience of extreme emotion, grounded mainly in unfulfilled desire—reveals ever more rich and complex layers. On the surface, this manifests itself in many songs about lost lovers. But closer scrutiny of these lamentations reveals intriguing subtexts. In "Tecto," her mourner transforms grief into a means of astral projection. The locked-up princess of "Send His Love To Me" finds hidden reserves of rage in deferred passion. "I Think I'm a Mother," with its low, buried vocal, seems the tale of a man identifying with his lover's departure. "The Dancer" chronicles a religious vision that



leaves its genderless protagonist starstruck and agonized.

The sense of dislocation and multiplied selves throughout *To Bring You My Love* comes as much from the music as from Harvey's spooky verses. Besides coproducer Flood, Harvey's chief collaborator is John Parish, an old mate from her first band, who plays percussion and guitar, as wizard Joe Gore and Mick Harvey, multi-instrumentalist of the Birthday Party and Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, also figure prominently. Yet Polly Harvey is clearly in charge throughout. As usual, the album's rhythms center around her alternately open-throated and guttural vocals. Although the album sounds remarkably spare at first, repeated spins disclose myriad sounds floating in what seems like open territory—nearly ambient harmonics, for example, or three guitar lines intertwining over Mick Harvey's keyboard bass. One song begins with a bell clanking like the rattling shackles of an approaching specter. Sometimes Polly Harvey's vocal is a concealed element, rearranging the order of the listening experience and denying the primacy of language to convey her mystical message. However she navigates these trips into moonshine, they uncover the spaces between wish and fulfillment, where people meet their darkest and most liberating alter egos. ANN POWERS



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THE POOH STICKS *Optimistic Fool* Seed

9In the middle of *Optimistic Fool*, chief Pooh Stick Hue sings a refuge song titled after "Up on the Roof," the Drifters' 32-year-old ode to paradise. In the Pooh Sticks' version, Hue celebrates a place where he can do whatever he likes, sing any song that impresses him, be in love. As the tune concludes, he exults in the recognition that, "I can know what I know."

Headquartered in Swansea, Wales, the Pooh Sticks have always specialized in knowing what they know, and *Optimistic Fool* is their clearest and least forced album yet. The deliberate piano settings and classic power-pop tensions of

modesty or wonder, but with the sort of confidence that comes from realizing you damn well know what you know.

"Opening Night" eases the showbiz phrase into the realm of romantic victory, climaxing excitedly with the line, "While everyone is cheering / And calling out for more / She and I'll be leaving by the stage door." The great "Cool in a Crisis" begins with rain fouling a planned beach party ("It's the middle of summer and you can't get tanned") before swinging with jabs of frustrated guitar notes into an appreciation of general unflappability. The Swansea pier provides the setting for "Starfishing," while a thousand pretentious rock recordings lie behind the sharp domestic comedy of "Song Cycle." The record's title track, a sad little love song driven by the line, "Not one single atom of me is still free," turns into a Pooh Sticks smash. *Optimistic Fool* thrives on the sort of thing the Pooh Sticks know.

JAMES HUNTER

MATTHEW SWEET *100% Fun* Zoo

8We don't turn to you, Matthew Sweet, for something new under the sun, 'cause all we get is the same old same old: Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy loses mind. For a while your only other story was: Boy gets record contract, boy fulfills record contract, boy loses record contract—three albums, three labels. But your third one, *Girlfriend*, hit big. Guitar was the answer. Forget the keyboards that cluttered up your first two records, and let Robert Quine and Richard Lloyd work that six-string hoodoo while you sing those sad little lovesick songs in that sad little lovesick voice.

But there's a price. Guitar don't come cheap. Guitar makes her own demands. "Never listen to electric guitar," sang David Byrne, and he was right. "Someone controls electric guitar," sang David Byrne, and he was wrong. No one controls electric guitar; electric guitar controls you. "A drum is a woman," said Duke Ellington, and he was wrong, too. *Electric guitar* is a woman. You wanna keep her around, you must feed her. And so you became *Altered Beast*, released a fourth album with much noise, many guitars drowning out your sweet little voice and your

1993's *Million Seller* are gone, replaced by quizzical countrysque jaunts, loose yet precisely locked-in rockers, beguiling ballads, plus anything else the Sticks and gifted producer Steve Gregory deem part of their hungry groove.

Having established an electric-acoustic buzz augmented by natural harmonies and gorgeously oxygenated rhythms, the spotlight shines brightly on lyrical content. Hue sings these 13 memorable melodies without much

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sweet little melodies. Sometimes even the melodies sounded noisy. Sometimes the lyrics sounded so simple maybe you wanted to turn your voice into a guitar and forget about crude words. Glenn Branca offers to produce your next record. (That's a joke, son.)

Instead, Brenden O'Brien, who tamed electric guitar for Stone Temple Pilots and Pearl Jam, hops aboard: 100 percent fun. Quine and Lloyd are still around, which is only

Bands, like radios, are instruments of communication. Their songs fill the vacuum sucking creates, to burst the entropy bubbles with which slackers protect themselves. When Eric Bachmen scratches his guitar and paints a Rockwell/Orwell picture of "Everybody gathered around the radio to hear the transmission from the devil's soul," he is yearning for community, significance, and excitement—slack's opposites. You could say the Archers' agenda is to slay slack and to arch with the urge to loaf. Not that the sneering Archers are immune to the seductions of slack; Vee Vee concludes with a slack-appreciation anthem, "Underachiever's March and Fight Song": "Underachievers / Attack at your leisure / Hoist up your guitars / And make 'em all believers."

Hoisting guitars is one way to combat what Winona Ryder's *Reality Bites* character called the "art of time suckage." Other ways include anger (which the Archers have) and romance (which they don't). The Archers' punk shittick is all over the map, steeped in countrified classic rock and gleeful noise, with Crazy Horse and the Grateful Dead no less equal predecessors

proper: You wouldn't walk away from a challenge, would you? And this time you're up to it. The usual girl problems, of course: "Sick of Myself" is one title, "Lost My Mind" another. Yes, yes, we know you've been sick of yourself since she walked out, but maybe, just maybe, she walked out because it was too much work propping up your fragile ego? "We're the Same," declares one song, in which case you're lucky she split; her "poor old me" shittick must have got tired real fast.

Of course you keep it fresh album after album. I especially like the slow ones, the Beach Boys harmonies at the end of "Not When I Need It." And have I ever mentioned you write really nice bridges? Not so fresh-faced as *Girlfriend* (will we ever be that young again?), but not so far gone as *Altered Beast*, either. Electric? Guitar is still here, but she works for you. For now.

JEFF SALAMON

ARCHERS OF LOAF

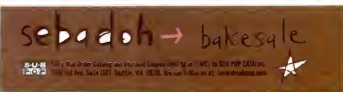
Vee Vee
Alias

8 The Archers of Loaf's second LP mentions "suck" almost as often as "radio." "Sucking"—slacking, mental atrophy, physical inertia—surrounds the North Carolina indie foursome. It haunts their homes, infests their friends, scams on the guest list at their shows. "Radio" is sucking's antidote—a metaphor for "rocking out," playing in a band, or simply doing something.



than the Dead Boys and the Clash, making Vee Vee an alt-rock smorgasbord. California feel-good guitars trickle around "Step Into the Light," a Beastie Boys tribute punches through "Nostalgia," and Hammond organ resonates over bad TV reception on "Fabricoh."

Sprung on an audience used to one-dimensional, reactionary blare, the Archers' honest anger is exceptional. Bachman's hoary, nasal desperation embodies Vee Vee's subtle mix of motivations. One second they're disappointed ("You're not the one I want you to be"), the next disgusted ("It's always the same people playing the same people off"), then frustrated, rejected, and afraid. But never blank, never afraid to bleed. (2815 W. Olive Avenue, Burbank, CA 91505) NATASHA STOVALL



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MIKE WATT *Ball-Hog or Tugboat?* Columbia

5 Assistant-songwriter-good guy Mike Watt's debut solo album critiques itself so ably I may as well get outta the way and let shit fly. First off, the concept: a buncha big-name, big-selling, big-money rock guys "throw down" with the former Minuteman on 15 Watt songs and two covers. The fine musicians lending their skills include Mike D, Evan Dando, Flea, Dave Grohl, Adam Horovitz, Cris and Curt Kirkwood, J Mascis, Thurston Moore, Krist Novoselic, Dave Piner, Lee Ranaldo, Henry Rollins, and Eddie Vedder. If this sounds like a benefit tribute record, it is—only what's in need of saving is not lives or good intentions but Watt's sagging career. (Anyone out there own the last Firehose album?)

Definitely the tugboat here, Watt gives Flea the flashy bass solo and sends his own affable brown voice to the mike on just two tracks. As for Watt's songs, let's just say the man's plainspoken populism gets sidetracked in these platinum throats. Is it deliberate or unfortunate irony, for example, when Vedder—Mr. Unexamined Bathos himself—ralls "Against the '70s": "It's not reality / Just someone else's sentimentality / It won't work for you?" Or when Dando wraps his lips winsomely around the playground chorus, "Piss-bottle man, piss-bottle man"? It doesn't help when the songs are by-the-numbers bash and

'big white baby with an ego' thing? I mean, get over it—it's so boring. A lot of these guys should just fucking quit music and become lifeguards at, like, Wild Waves." Choice words, followed by J Mascis's callow and crudely egotistical take on the Eddie Hazel-Funkadelic calling card, "Maggot Brain." I couldn't script a better confirmation.

Ball-Hog or Tugboat? is not all dreck. Watt and saxophonist Tony Atherton smooch sinuously on the grooving "E-Ticket Ride," with Mike D and Coco Gordon Moore (baby!) providing coltish play-by-play. Avant-jazz-punk guitarist Nels Cline lifts at least three tracks into the ozone. And "Side Mouse Advice," with Flea's cool trumpet and Carla Bozulich's hot vox, struts so sassily you wanna lick your fingers.

But the last track shows how swell this album might've been—Horovitz doing a basic funky rhythm on guitar and drums so Watt can pump bass and relate his San Pedro dreams. Hey, Pedro ain't about all those wanking rubes, Mike. It's about you and your full heart and your cranky Everyman voice. Take it back, dude. Take it back.

TERRI SUTTON

GUIDED BY VOICES *Alien Lanes* Matador

7 Hey kids, you can write your town Guided By Voices songs at home. Start with random words culled from magazines lying around your house (I like, "So it's a shock when this simple subplot..." from my new *Entertainment Weekly*), add some grandly obscure non sequiturs ("tramples down from Georgia's wind-sock juggernaut"), then find a four-syllable phrase to serve as a singsong refrain ("laugh-tracker smiler"). Now all you have to do is write a languid, pungent pop tune to make the whole thing insidiously singable.

Yeah, but that last part isn't so easy. As it happens, only Guided By Voices can write Guided By Voices songs. Which is just as well, since that way there's no slack to take up. Before this Dayton, Ohio, band gained indie fame in 1993, it had already released six albums. Since then it has spat forth three more records and 81 more songs, with another album due before the end of the year. What a thrilling, terrifying place lead singer-song-sweeper Robert Pollard's brain must be: psy-

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pop, with little to distinguish them beyond simple repetition.

There are other embarrassments in this vein, but why bother mentioning them when Watt has sampled an answering machine message (staged?) of Kathleen Hanna succinctly damning the project: "I'm not so sure I wanna be included in your little white rock boy fuckin' hall of shame. Do I really want to be sandwiched in between these guys that are just doing the whole

chedelic ditties and power-pop hooks materializing from nowhere and echoing almost every band before, during, or after the British invasion.

If *Guided By Voices* is new to you, the chaotic 28-song *Alien Lanes* offers a rockier introduction than last year's *Bee Thousand*. There are definitely some classic GBV stylings here; the band's Brit fetish results in such gloriously hummable we-could-have-been-bigger-than-the-Beatles numbers as "My Valuable Hunting Knife," "As We Go Up We Go Down," and "A Good Flying Bird." For contrast, you have the Sebadoh-style confession of "I Wanna Be a Dumbcharger" and the curiously Rollins-like "Pimple Zoo" rant. Pollard end company slaps a distinctive, corrosive elegant stamp on even their most imitative material; the bands GBV sounds like start to sound like it.

Alien Lanes' self-interrupting breathlessness makes it a difficult sort of pop record. Melodies tumble over one another like cuts on an old hardcore album. "Big Chief Chinese Restaurant" seems ready to take flight with the stirring phrase, "In a highway / Where nothing goes my way," but then stops painfully at the one-minute mark. Other throwaways

cut off after 30 or even 20 seconds. But better too short than too long; at least five or six songs on *Alien Lanes* are as perfect as perfect can be, and the bric-a-brac around them never bores us for an instant. (676 Broadway, New York, NY 10012)

ALEX ROSS

CHRIS WHITLEY *Din of Ecstasy* Columbia

In their search for avenues to express their pain that aren't either spent (like grunge) or off-limits (like hip hop), artists such as Nirvana, the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, Beck, and P.J. Harvey have sparked yet another of the blues' periodic yet increasingly improbable revivals. The blues' simple elegance still conveys emotional truths, which Chris Whitley jacks right into *Din of Ecstasy*.

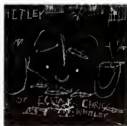
Whitley doesn't play House of Blues chestnuts for beer-swilling commodities brokers on a big night out. He's too desperate. His haunted power blooz recalls Jimi Hendrix disciples from Robin Trower to Prince, but dosed with Downtown noise. Though Whitley is an explo-

sively sensuous guitarist, there's no six-string hot-doggery à la Stevie Ray Vaughan; and though his music is plenty druggy, it's not Kings X-style psychedelia lite. Goaded by stalwart bassist Alan Gevaert and Dougie Bowne's outstanding neo-Mitch Mitchell drumming, *Din of Ecstasy* trounces the acid-wash-

equates bliss with the sensational makes it perfectly clear that opiates are in the house.

Songs such as "Never," "Din," and "Oh God My Heart Is Ready Now," are as tuneful as you can get within a rigid power-trio format. Whitley fires off three- or four-minute tunes where others would spend eight minutes rehashing tired blues riffs and moaning about what happened when they woke up this morning. Whitley sings his disjointed lyrics like someone talking to himself, but the words that pop through this distorted sonic drapery—"All roads lead back on Into town," "I can't get off," or just "Dark"—carry enormous weight.

In an earnest but futile attempt to substitute one ecstasy for another, Whitley often dangles ripe sexual imagery redolent of early blues and jazz. "I'm gunning, I'm gunning now," he yowls in "The New Machine," "Gasoline roll down her thigh." Phew! But *Din of Ecstasy* is mostly about eerie modes of dislocation. Whitley wisely avoids singing about getting wasted and strung out. Instead he talks about the million and one ways you alienate the people you love because you're wasted and strung out. Strip away the narcotic



jeans roots rock of Whitley's 1991 debut, *Living With the Law*. In fact, you'd swear Whitley had visited the crossroads in the meantime.

"Narcotic Prayer," *Din's* opener, fesses up right away: "I copped and caught a movie." Whitley sings in a homey, soulful monotone that makes Lou Reed sound like Caruso in comparison. "The lights come up and I just crash." But his words are redundant. The way Whitley's music

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trappings, however, and all Whitley is doing is pondering that age-old blues dilemma: "Why do I keep fucking up?" And that's something we can all relate to. **MICHAEL AZERRAD**

MARIANNE FAITHFULL

A Secret Life Island

A Marianne Faithfull is the archetypal rock'n'roll casualty, a glamorous '60s icon who stood in the eye of the hurricane and got sucked up by the zeitgeist. Faithfull, however, was never actually a rock star. She was a bystander, an appendage, even in her heyday. Her role as Mick Jagger's muse always overshadowed her dulcet pop records, and her drug habit and suicide attempts generated a lot more attention than her stage-acting (though she probably made a great Ophelia).

Faithfull once confessed to a Stones biographer that "Drugs kept me from being a terrorist...I felt that either I was going to explode out into violence...or I was going to have to implode to contain it." She chose the latter, and over the ensuing decade devolved from angelic aristocrat to tragic junkie. Since 1979, Faithfull has built a sporadic career around the survivor persona, a world-weary chanteuse with a broken heart and voice like cinders, leaning heavily on this shtick from the blistering rage of *Broken English* through the torched songs of *Strange Weather*, right down to her 1990 live album *Blazing Away*. On *A Secret Life*, however, Faithfull settles into a colder and wiser serenity.

Possessed of a limited though harrowingly effective vocal range, Faithfull depends on sensitively appropriate arrangements and production. Hooking up with Angelo Badalamenti (best known for his marvelous *Twin Peaks* music and work with Julee Cruise) seemed like a smart move; his disquieting Muzak noir isn't that far from *Broken English*'s electro-edginess. On *A Secret Life*, though, Badalamenti swamps Faithfull's usually scorching voice with Mellotron washes of synthetic strings. With its chintzy mandolin and maudlin Euro-schlock melody, "She" could be the theme song from some low-budget *Love Story* rip-off. "Flaming September" and "Love in the Afternoon" (many of these titles sound like B-movies) mismatch overwrought lyrics with

underwhelming arrangements. The intent is Scott Walker, the effect is Giorgio Moroder with a head cold. Only "Losing" and "Sleep" approach the kind of orchestral majesty warranted by haunted lines like, "It is strange to sleep alone in a place no one knows."

The spoken-word "Prologue" (borrowed from Dante) sets listeners up for grand drama; the "Epilogue" (from *The Tempest*) intends to be the soothing resolution to a tumultuous excursion. Unfortunately, nothing really happens between these bookends. Subtract the spoken stuff and you're left with a stingy 29 minutes of eural novocaine. Still, with that husky upper-crust accent, a cushy job no doubt awaits Faithfull at *Masterpiece Theatre*. **JOY PRESS**

ROKY ERICKSON

All That May Do My Rhyme Trance Syndicate

Roky Erickson's music is refracted invariably through the prism of legend. As with kindred spirits Spence and Syd Barrett, Erickson's notoriety combines equal parts misunderstood genius and acid-fried loon. Based on his '60s work in the garage-rocking 13th Floor Elevators, Erickson is variously cited as a major Janis Joplin influence, a pre-Summer of Love psych-rock innovator, and the greatest Texas songwriter since Buddy Holly. The Elevators stopped on the same floor as the Velvets and the

ROKY ERICKSON



Stooges, all touchstone artists whose real impact emerged belatedly in musicians as varied as R.E.M., Julien Cope, the Butthole Surfers, and ZZ Top.

That should be enough myth for anyone short of Joseph Campbell, but it does not stop there. During the ensuing 25 years, Erickson has been a sporadically brilliant solo artist struggling with poverty, the law, precarious mental health, and

relentlessly awful record company mojo (his name has appeared on more than 100 albums—most of them bootlegs). In 1993, however, Erickson made his first live appearance in six years, displaying vocal chops as startling as his zonked appearance and mid-song yawning. Likewise, *All That May Do My Rhyme* is his first record in more than a decade, and quite possibly the first with his full financial and artistic participation.

Unlike Erickson's '60s psychedelic fire and '70s satanic thunder, *My Rhyme* is a poignant, even tasteful work befitting a sweet, sensitive man a few years shy of 50. Largely acoustic (with lulling guitars by John Reed, Charlie Sexton, and Butthole Surfer Paul Leary), the record focuses exactly where it should: on his songs' easy swing and, more impressively, Erickson's for-the-ages wall of a rock'n'roll throat, ghostly and gorgeous and scary and soulful all at once.

Of course, what's an Erickson record without previously released material? The new acoustic version of "Starry Eyes" doesn't count, because it's served with Lou Ann Barton's guiltingly sweet co-vocal.

Five other oft-heard chestnuts, from the raucous ("Don't Slander Me") and aching ("Clear Night For Love," "You Don't Love Me Yet") to the downright repetitive (yep, "Starry Eyes" again) also appear. Fortunately, these neglected classics haven't withered through overexposure. More than mere filler, they make *All That May Do My Rhyme* an even handier introduction to a resurrected great. (P.O. Box 49771, Austin, TX 78765)

JASON COHEN

SNOW

Murder Love
Motor Jam/EastWest

5 I first heard Snow's 1993 Canadian reggae smash, "Informer," while washing dishes with MTV on in the other room. "What the hell is that?" I thought, then looked in and wondered, "Who the hell is that?" How Snow wore his glasses reminded me of Elvis Costello when I used to like him (first three albums), back when Elvis Costello reminded me of how I looked. It pissed me off when MTV started using subtitles (they didn't use them for "Smells Like Teen

Spirt"), so I refused to read the lyrics to "Informer," just like I refuse to read subtitles.

My friends thought M.C. Shan's rap made Snow's seem wooden by comparison, but to me Snow's voice seemed quite pliable (*ba/sa-wood-en*, maybe), and the Snowman's warmth (I) proved Shan just another dime-a-dozen rap thug. But I still enjoyed the contrast, and I liked the story: something about being spied on, strip-searched, locked up.

Snow's sophomore CD is called *Murder Love*, though he's not really into murdering love or even loving murder. Just like "Informer" and the lyrically similar but more forlorn "Lonely Monday Morning" on *12 Inches of Snow*, Snow's best new songs are more about doing hard time than doing crime. "Babylon" spotlights yet another 911-dialing snitch not minding his own business; and somebody's innocent son gets arrested in "Si We (Charged for Murder)."

Snow has more fun singing about murder than about love. Slow makeout mush replaces the debut's Algerian-raïdancehall mix with some lightfooted Marvin Gaye liquid funk. A shame, since the Little River

Band played Gayer rhythms in "Reminiscing" than any Rastas ever have. But Snow's "Let's Get It On" bass lines sound more like Chic than Gaye. And "Anything for You" isn't nearly as seductive as Denroy Morgan's Jamaican-accented 1981 soul-rap hit of the same name, while



a "nigger" (Snow-whitley's word) gets gunned down in "Bad Men," (the should've-been sequel to Inner Circle's "Bad Boys.")

Then again, like most reggae toasters, Snow seems to have learned to rap by studying Dick Van Dyke's "hum-diddle-diddle-diddle-hum-diddle-eye" chimneysweep scat in *Mary Poppins*. So I can't guarantee I get the plots of these poems completely right. **CHUCK EDGY**

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MOVIES



Leonardo DiCaprio gets lost in the lowlife in *The Basketball Diaries*, while David Caruso climbs out of the underworld in *Kiss of Death*.

LEONARDO DICAPRIO is the actor of his generation. And that's not a compliment. There just isn't anyone else. The collective charisma of our most highly touted young stars—Pitt! Slater! Cruise!—made *Interview With the Vampire* seem like a school play. These are lean times for guy thespians over 12 and under 30. But Leonardo DiCaprio's blue-lipped, drooling, cold turkey crying jags in *The Basketball Diaries* (New Line) ought to give fresh hope to nascent performers worried that their endless nights of bartending will lead to no more than two weeks on *Malrose Place* as one of Alison's mistakes.

Adapted from the autobiography

of Manhattan lowlife poet Jim Carroll, *Diaries* is a real star turn. DiCaprio gets to be cat-faced and rambunctious while reliving Carroll's days as a Catholic high school basketball hotshot. Whether sniffing glue on the Staten Island Ferry, skinny-dipping in the sewage-infested Hudson, or kicking the shit out of a rival team whose lockers they've just ransacked, Carroll and compadres Mickey ("Marky" Mark Wahlberg), Neutron (Patrick McGaw), and Pedro (James Medio) turn Manhattan into an Isle of Joy. Then the lad, whose free-form poetry-scribbling talent is even more pronounced than his court skills, is

initiated into the world of blow (by TV's Doublemint Twins) and thus begins his downward spiral. Soon, he's developed a man-size heroin habit that necessitates mugging old women, knocking over convenience stores, and servicing geezers in public toilets. A term in the pokie puts him on the straight and narrow, free to peruse his old habit into a performance piece, a book or two, and a crappy punk band.

Inevitably, the pulchritude of most of the ensemble—even when squinting through bloodshot eyes and expelling ropes of snot—and the rock video apprenticeship of director Scott Kalvert, manage to make addiction seem romantic. It takes a cameo from Carroll to drive home the fact that this is a cautionary tale. When he and DiCaprio play their scene, the actor, feigning drug-rage, seems merely bushed; the author, on the other hand, looks like he's just recently been exhumed.

David Caruso is another actor from whom people are expecting a lot. Unfortunately, what they're expecting is failure, humiliation, and obscurity. Media oracles had two words for the above-the-title role in *Kiss of Death* (20th Century Fox) that apurred on his perfunctory and ungracious exit from *NYPD Blue*: Hello, Larry. Directed by Barbet Schroeder (*Single White Female*) and penned by Richard Price (*Clockers*), this is an in-name-only remake of the 1947 noir classic best known for Richard Widmark's sniggering psycho, Tommy Udo. The '95 version finds the palafaced redhead playing a familiar part—a hard man trying to live a clean life within the boundaries of his own moral code—but without his familiar cop's togs. His Jimmy Kilmartin is enjoying family life in Queens when evil cousin Ronnie (Michael Rapaport, who's fast cornering the market in Dumb White Guys, playing one in *The Basketball Diaries*, too) sucks him back into the car-theft racket in which he once dabbled. He's caught in the act and a cop (Samuel L. Jackson) takes a bullet in the face. From there, he's incarcerated and bounced around between the DA (Stanley Tucci) who wants him to sing like a bird and the auto shop mob boss who wants him silent as a grave.

This is bad news for Caruso because the role of crime boss Little Junior Brown is played by Nicolas Cage, hell-bent on reminding us of the days when he was the biggest, battiest bug-eyed berserker around. His Little Junior is a sonata of character quirks—a muscle-bound father-worshipping asthmatic dressed in white with a pathological fear of metal in his mouth, Caruso may be dwarfed by Cage's triumphant return to rampaging nuttiness (he's also upstaged by Jackson, whose wound leaves him with a permanently watering eye), but the film grips tightly enough to keep his pale face egg-free for now.

JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

COMING ATTRACTIONS

New Jersey Drive

Nick Gomez's new film is kind of an urban *Groundhog Day* in that the same thing happens in every scene. Bored teens heist jalopies, joyride around New Jersey, cops give chase, look up the kids, they get out, and so on and so on. The movie, executive-produced by Spike Lee, narrows into a vendetta waged by cop Rosco (Saul Stein, in an almost porno-level performance) against car booster Jason (Sharron Corley). (Gramercy)

Dolores Claiborne

Kathy Bates reaped great rewards playing one of Stephen King's most notorious villains in *Misery*. This time round she takes on the role of the eponymous put-upon heroine, pushed beyond endurance to commit a heinous crime. Jennifer Jason Leigh (below) is her big-city reporter daughter, returning to her small-town roots to find out what made Mom do it. (Castle Rock) —J.B.





The X-man: David Duchovny trying hard not to burst into flames.

"The truth is out there," runs *The X-Files* mantra. And the truth is...everybody's lying!

FRIDAY NIGHT, SOMETHING sinister seeps out of TV screens, freezing the generally fickle attention spans of the couch-bound. Unable to resist the lure of the inexplicable, viewers find themselves in a dark universe where paranoia is currency, fear runs rampant, and a grotesque, malignant life force lies in wait, ready to prey on the defenseless. Yeah, Urkel's pretty scary. But over on Fox, there's a show designed to give you the willies for real.

Following the announcement of *The X-Files*' slot on the 1993 schedule, friendly wagers were made about the imminence of its cancellation. Those of us who put our bucks on the axe failing sometime during the opening credits have been chowing down on tasty crow ever since. Dimly lit and funereally paced, this saga of initially mismatched feds covering the paranormal waterfront has become a demographic medal of honor for Fox despite being an anomaly within the

screechy environs of that network, not to mention when set against the accelerated heartbeat of current all-around champs *ER* (full of people banging into each other and bawling "subdural hematoma!") and *NYPD Blue*. This means that its reach has extended beyond the expected audience of pale, plucked conspiracy theorists, cult-TV conventioners, and onliners tempting carpal tunnel syndrome. Like *Twin Peaks* in reverse, *The X-Files*, with its homicidal household items, unwelcome alien visitors, and numerous genetic glitches, started small and grew like a hideous parasite inside an unknowing human host.

Beyond the show's shorts-moistening aspects (I watched the episode about the mutant flatworms between the cracks of fingers—and not my own!) the audience, online and otherwise, is enthralled by its two leads. Glimed-eyed David Duchovny is Special Agent Fox Mulder. The true believer. The sky-

watcher. He saw his sister abducted by aliens and thus is quick to pin everything from a logging catastrophe to coarse toilet paper on extraterrestrial intervention. "The truth is out there" is his—and the show's—raison d'être. Gillian Anderson is Special Agent Dana Scully. The scientist. The skeptic. The cold voice of logic challenging yet invigorating Mulder. Their enduring partnership is the bonding of science and imagination. They provide the heart of *The X-Files*' darkness. Even though one too many plotlines have paid homage to *Alien* and *The Thing*, the chemistry between the open-minded psychologist and the rational pathologist keeps the episodes afloat.

Since the series began to heat up, Internet X-philes have feverishly dissected the complexities of the Mulder-Scully relationship—those long looks, those meaningful silences—hoping the couple doesn't couple, but speculating on the possibilities if they do. Although unresolved sexual tension provides the fuel on which many successful programs run, it also becomes a postcoital roadblock that few shows

successfully negotiate. *The X-Files*' second season's solution to this problem was to separate its two stars, an eventuality necessitated by Gillian Anderson's infatigation. Her return, after a possibly government-engineered alien abduction, has led to the two relating to each other in a courtly, tender, just barely platonic manner that recalls those special stolen moments between Hunter and Sergeant Dee Dee.

Probing the unexplained is not a pursuit new to television. Who could forget Leonard Nimoy's narrated splashdowns in the Bermuda Triangle and Loch Ness back in the '70s on *In Search Of...*? But where programs like Fox's real-life investigative show, *Encounters*, tell a spooky story ("The UFOs, they're coming, they're coming I tell you!"), and allows you to draw your own conclusions—or, more likely, reach for the salsa dip—*The X-Files* points a rigid and accusing finger. The episodes may be about grisly murders committed by mutant flatworms, vicious cash registers, or pyrokinetic assassins, but the conclusion is always the same: *The government is lying to you!* This is what makes *The X-Files* unique. There's no subtext here, nothing thinly veiled. Week after week it blatantly states that your elected representatives have a secret agenda, that life-forms from other planets have landed on earth, that we have killed them and may now be collaborating with them. At its most effective, *The X-Files* promotes anti-establishment ideas in a powerfully plausible manner. I mean, it was the post-Chernobyl primordial soup that created those mutant flatworms. Don't you see, it was our own stupidity, we did it to ourselves....

JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

LIVE!

PEARL JAM/NEIL YOUNG & CRAZY HORSE/L7

Constitution Hall
Washington, D.C.
January 15, 1995

COAXING PEARL JAM out of its Seattle shell to perform its first electric concerts in nine months probably wasn't easy. But this concert (the second of two) proved a perfect opportunity for Pearl Jam to live up to its reputation as reluctant rock stars who care. It was: (1) for a good cause. Roughly \$100,000 was raised for Voters for Choice, the organization Gloria Steinem runs to assist the campaigns of pro-choice candidates; (2) a victorious battle in Pearl Jam's war against Ticketmaster; though Constitution Hall has an exclusive contract with Ticketmaster, it may distribute benefit tickets through charity organizations, so Voters for Choice sold the \$25 seats itself through a mail-order lottery system; (3) a low-key event. The intimate hall contained only 3,600 seats (for which 175,000 requests were received), few merchandising stalls, and nary a

prop or fancy lighting effect onstage.

Pearl Jam delivered a two-hour set, turning in 20 songs, including nine from the band's new album, *Vitalogy*. The band showed no signs of rust, but Eddie Vedder was hardly a natural onstage. For the first half of the show, when he sang he didn't know what to do with his arms; when he played guitar, he didn't know what to do with his feet. But something strange happened during "Daughter." Vedder was struck by a lightning bolt of passion. He added a few new lyrics to the song, singing in his stubbly, sincere voice, "My body is nobody's body but mine / You got your own body." When the song was over, he started rapidly pacing small circles in the center of the stage, as though trying to cool himself off. After seven or so circles, he stopped and carried his excess emotion and energy into the next song, "State

of Love and Trust."

The band relaxed from that moment on, stretching some songs and ebridging others. Guitarists Stone Gossard and Mike McCready complemented one another perfectly; the former focused on speed and heaviness while the latter sought the cleanest and most potent note combinations possible. The band's new drummer, Jack Irons, played simple, blunt rhythms, coming down on his set as hard as he could.

Though Neil Young had stepped onstage with Pearl Jam the night before to play a new song, "Act of Love," he left right after his set this night. Instead, Vedder sneaked a couple of lines from "Act of Love" (in a mock Neil Young whinny) into "Immortality" and brought out L7 to help him close the show with a version of Young's "Rockin' in the Free World."

Young was the only performer who didn't address the issue of choice onstage. The flannel and denim-clad grunge-rock progenitor instead just ripped and tore through a short but highly appropriate set. He opened with what should be an anthem for the why-me generation, "F*cking Up," peaked with a moving version of "The Needle and the Damage Done," which could easily double as a requiem for the Seattle scene's many drug casualties, continued with a song written for Kurt Cobain ("Sleeps With Angels"), and closed with "Hey Hey, My My

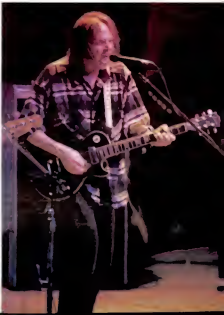
(Into the Black)." Young sang the words quoted on Cobain's suicide note—"It's better to burn out than to fade away"—but stressed a different line of the song, one Cobain should have listened to: "Once you're gone, you can't come back / You're out of the blue and into the black."

L7 proved itself second only to the Melvins when it comes to bogging down songs in heavy guitar sludge. The Rock for Choice cofounders (Dan Peters of Mudhoney filled in for carpal tunnel syndrome sufferer Dee Plakas on drums) just might be the only party band that doesn't make party music. Their set ended with a demonstration of the right to choose. When Vedder and Irons rushed the stage in Beavis and Butt-head masks, the women of L7 pummeled the obnoxious cartoon characters and beat the two icons into the ground.

NEIL STRAUSS



Above, Pearl Jam; left, L7's Donita Sparks and Jennifer Finch with Beavis; right, Neil Young.



VOODOO

(continued from page 177)

en itchy swelling exactly where he had touched me. My arm turned red, then purple. An hour after that, the irritation was gone. Then I believed a little more.) The voodoo man began to sing a sweet and beautiful song to the angels. He fanned the other five cards in his left hand. He said to me: "Sometimes you feel like you're not normal, because you have spirits helping you."

"He said he gonna pour some stuff on you," said the translator. "Anything he give you, not right away, but one day in your home, day or night, you gonna see something. Somebody try to pull a revolver on you, he gonna give you some words to prey, nobody can shoot you and you just gonna disappear. When you need perfect things, man, you spend your money." The voodoo man wanted \$7,000 to make my house a voodoo house, or \$5,557 just for personal protection.

A pretty young girl entered the room, the usual sort of pretty and desperate girl. The voodoo man opened an attache case in which loose vials rolled around. Removing one vial, he uncorked it, sniffed it, and handed it to her. She kissed his cheek. Later the driver told me: "What that little girl pick up just now is for the immigration. Her husband was in jail for drugs, and this voodoo man he get him out. Now she go for the green card. Immigration gonna ask her questions. If she shake that little bottle, immigration gonna be mute. Gonna let her go with the green card."

"Do you think the voodoo man helped her?" I said.

"When they believe like that, they find their own solution."

"And you believe in this man?"

"Yes, I believe he got the spirit. Because he know you was with the group. How he know that? And he know you want the protection. And he know you go to other voodoo men. And also he shake both hands right and left, and speak strange way so I cannot understand his words. He got the spirit sure."

The taxi driver drove me back to Little Havana. He had long since pressed the controls that locked the doors and windows; he was always watching for trouble, always expecting it, and so

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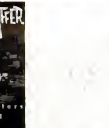
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It seemed to me that in his own way he had the spirit, too.

A JOY CEREMONY

The taxi driver's ex-girlfriend told us where the joy ceremony was, she being the subject of his classic pronouncement, which deserves to be carved in marble, on being involved with voodoo women: "They fuck when they want to, they smile when they want to, they cry when they want to—it's no way to live!"

We drove past pale blocks of apartments and came to a courtyard. Plump black ladies in white stood at the door cooking. "I'm scared," the taxi driver said to me. "Even my little daughter, she say to me I'm chicken. I'm chickenshit."

He told me that in Haiti if you came to a crossroads at night a man might offer you red wine. He said that if you ever drank that wine you would be in trouble because the wine was actually human blood, and next time you came to a crossroads at night, if you didn't bring a human victim for the voodooists to sacrifice, they would drink your blood instead.

He was still smoking a cigarette outside, screwing up his courage, when I went in. I sat in the row of chairs in the outer room. The inner room was where the altar was, and that was already full. On the counter across from me a pretty girl in a black polka-dot dress was sitting. She smiled. After awhile she came and sat next to me.

Now the nephew of the voodoo man who had offered to sell me personal protection for \$5,557 came in and shook my hand. (Later the taxi driver told me that he'd guaranteed the safety of the car in this bad neighborhood, saying that his mafia would look after it.) "You like her?" he said to me, indicating the girl.

"She's gorgeous," I said. He laughed with pleasure and high-fived me. "She my cousin, man! I tell her!" It was this young woman who would soon become a spirit's "horse."

There were many people in white, especially young people. Initially there were about 20 souls, but more kept coming and at the height of it there were perhaps 75 or more.

It was supposed to start at 9:00, the taxi driver's voodoo woman had said. At 11:00 it finally did. By the closed door on the left-hand side of the altar, a young man in a white shirt and glasses began to sing. He had a beautiful tenor voice. Most of what he sang I didn't understand. But I did comprehend *Saint-Pierre*,

ouvrez la porte, which means "Saint Peter, open the gate."

The singing gradually went faster and faster. Then the raising of the candle began. At last someone handed the candle to me. I had not expected to be shown this favor, and was grateful and a little nervous that I might do something wrong. The short candle stub dripped wax on my left hand. The cup of rum was in my right. Approaching the altar, I raised both high as I had seen others do. Then I knelt and poured three splashes of liquor into a basin, got up, and approached the door, which I had assumed to be that of a closet. Someone opened it for me and closed it after. I later learned that this was the place and time to wish, and I did in fact make a wish to see the spirits, which, as you'll see, was in a sense gratified.

Anyway, it was not a closet after all, but an anteroom with another door open to the night. Now I think I should have splashed rum three times on the ground just outside, but I did not know. So I made my wish and then went out without doing anything else. I walked back through the crowd of people, feeling happy to have been accepted, passed through the kitchen, and splashed down rum outside the door, because I'd seen others do that; then I returned to bring the candle and cup to the next person.

"Something gonna happen, man," said the taxi driver. "I tell you, something gonna happen. I'm scared." The girl in the polka-dot dress, the voodoo man's nephew's cousin who'd been sitting next to me, was dancing faster and faster. "Nothing gonna happen, man," said the taxi driver, trembling. "No spirit gonna come." Then he said: "Something gonna happen."

Suddenly the girl staggered and threw her arms up, as if trying to thrust away an invisible attacker. (This is, I am told, a classic sign of possession. The last reflex of the "horse" before she loses her consciousness to the rider is a struggle, which doesn't last long.) Now the rider was seated in her skull, and she began to dance again with incredible speed. Another woman had been possessed at the same time, and they danced in tandem. Through the excited throng, I glimpsed somebody wrapping colored scarves around the two "horses." These are the mantles of specific voodoo gods. The one who had sat next to me began to come near. I'll never forget how that

young woman's eyeballs had rolled down in her head so that the gleaming whites confronted me with crazy blind nobility and pride, the head thrown back, the body drenched with sweat; suddenly the woman stretched out her hands to a massive seated man who gave himself into her grasp obediently.

With whiplike snappings and convulsions of her wrists she brought him to his feet. He hung slack, letting her shake him. Then she let go, and he sat down again. In turn she seized us all, men and women, and each of the ones she had touched smiled joyously. When she came to me, I wondered whether I'd be passed over, but she snatched my hands and jerked me about like the others. Squeezing the possessed woman's hands tightly, I gazed into her face trying to understand where she was, and instead of the orgasmic self-absorption I had expected, I perceived full recognition of me as a soul; but her expression was so eerie; she saw me and knew me but whatever she was that saw me was crazed, hurt, exalted, and utterly beyond me.

She let me go. (Strangely, as I think of all this now I am most reminded of the atmosphere at the Full Gospel Church. These two congregations, which would have feared and distrusted each other, were both filled with dignity and delight. They both worshipped something higher than themselves.)

When the spirit-rider one had thus laid hands on everybody, she began a second round, this time splashing onto our hands a fragrant oil from a tall bottle she'd pulled from between her breasts. Like the others, I rubbed my hands together after receiving the liquid, then anointed my sweating face and forehead. The room was stifling. Every hour or two a lady brought us all napkins with which to wipe our glistening faces, but it was so hot and there was only one ineffectual fan, and on this second progress of hers the possessed woman swept it off its stand in a magnificent rage so that it thudded onto the carpet and the blade stopped whirling.

She was back at the altar now, whirling and sometimes falling backward, always to be caught by someone in the attentive crowd. Suddenly she squatted beside a huge offering of beans and rice. She worked the food with her hands like a potter and crammed patty-cakes of it down inside her dress, packing it against

her breasts. She cried out in a deep hoarse voice. Everyone was silent, respectfully listening and trying to understand (but when I say everyone I do not mean everyone, because unlike, say, Pastor Brown's church service, at this gathering the people in the front room, particularly those nearest to the window, felt free to talk and joke among themselves or go through the kitchen and out the front door at any time to have a smoke in the coolness of the courtyard).

She began to sing in that same deep, charged voice, and the crowd sang with her. The women were practically screaming, and the drummers were thwacking the handles of their butter knives on the bottoms and rims of upturned plastic tubs and we were clapping as hard as we could, my palms ringing together like metal, aching.

Now the spirit-ruled woman had rushed to the window of the outer room. She paused and began to rock her hips. An older lady smiled knowingly and drew the curtain against the silent crowd outside. The woman strutted now, more and more hungrily sexual. She began to samba her way back to the altar. "Man, I wanna stick my dick in her!" the taxi driver whispered. "I believe I'm gonna get hard!"

I felt the same way, and so, I think, did every other man in the place. "Unfortunately," said the nephew of the voodoo man who had offered to sell me personal protection for \$5,557, "most of the voodoo ladies here are lesbians." That seemed borne out when the woman, squinting before the altar, permitted the other women to help pull her dress over her head, and then she began to mount people. Shiny with sweat that made her underchemise stick to her like a second skin, she rushed to and fro, heaving in front of each chosen partner without warning. More often than not the partners were women. (A day or two later, when I queried Madame Yvette at the Macaya Bumba Botanica, she made sense of what had happened. The young woman had been possessed by a male spirit! "It's Papa Guédé," she said matter-of-factly. "He works in the cemetery and he's a good father.")

The possessed woman made love to each of her choices very briefly, the two bodies touching only at the waist. And as soon as she'd finished with them, half a minute later, they'd

(continued on page 210)

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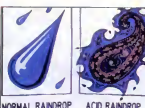
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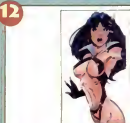
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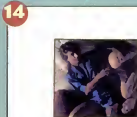


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VOODOO

(continued from page 207)

leap up laughing and singing.

"Now they all becoming crazy!" whispered the taxi driver in awe and horror. Somebody was shaking the esson, the ritual calabash with what they say are stones and snake bones inside. (But Madame Yvette told me that you can put whatever you want inside. She herself used dice and quarters.)

Another woman had become possessed. She rushed about in a rage. Her fist struck me on the side of the head. In the outer room, a man leaned up against the wall at an angle, as stiff as the provairiel board; it seemed as if one could have stretched him between two chairs and used him for a sawhorse, so rigid was he. Only one part of him was moving—the hand that drew the candle flame slowly back and forth across the tip of his tongue.

That was how it was with the spirits, which I had perhaps thought of as gentle, wretched, distant beings like southern girls in Lafayette, standing on their whitewashed porches in the evening time; or spirits like the fat ghetto girls in New Orleans who sat smoking and drinking beer and talking on the extension phone out on their stoops. Some spirits were like that. Others were wild and rash and cruel. There were more of them than stars; there were millions and billions of them; who could know them all? I wanted to know some, at least; I wanted to see what it felt like to be a "horse." "You feel like you are another person," Madame Yvette later told me. "Physically you feel it with your spine. It's like a water or a snake coming into your spine. Sometimes you don't have a good feeling because you have a heart pumping; you have to be afraid. When the spirit goes, you feel weak after. It's really hard to be a *bruja*." But that never happened for me and maybe I hadn't missed anything because they say that when the spirit goes you remember nothing.

At half past two in the morning, the spirits began to leave people. And I decided to go. A lady said to me: "Wait. The spirits want to talk with you." But a moment later she returned and said: "It's finished."

AMERICA'S BIRTHDAY

It was dusk on the Fourth of July and I set with thousands of people on a grassy hill just across from the

Intercontinental in Miami, with a flag four stories deep hanging from the top. Children lit sparklers on the basketball court and occasionally sent illegal fireworks screeching with cadmium yellow light into the puffy-clouded sky. A band was playing heartfully loud, and people had begun to cheer. "Happy birthday, America!" a father shouted joyfully to the small girl riding on his shoulders.

I wanted it to truly be America's birthday. I loved my country very much and wanted it to be happy instead of sickening each year more and more toward death. All things pass. When would the end come for these hypothetically united states? The air was cool and sea-fresh now, and lovers were lying in happy laps. The fireworks began to go off like light-caliber pistol-shots, and I thought of the two double murders that the Happy Brains had explained in 15 seconds epic on television that night, along with the assault on the policemen's wife. A red star rose into the indigo sky as a man and a woman laid each other laughing by the head. Then a drunk fell down onto another man's stash of liquor and smashed a bottle and they got into a fight. And once again I wondered: Can faith protect us from violence?

I thought of Miriam saying to me: "Last year, things got more worse, because they had more killings; and this year it's 200 already."

"What's responsible?"

"Youth mismanagement. Trying to make money too fast. A lot of their mothers and fathers is involved in the same activities. People is so closed in and so closed up in the city environment that they only see the capitalist situation, and the fashion is inviting them, so they get it through drugs and fast selling."

"Can voodoo help?"

"I would say so," Miriam replied. "You focus your mind in the right direction. I really believe that if you pray as often as possible it will help protect you from guns and all kinds of weapons. One guy down the street practiced witchcraft. He wanted to challenge us. He gave us death threats. I preyed a lot. He went out and bought his candles and set his altars and it bekkified on him. He committed suicide."

We always like to believe that we are rational, and so we build up a scar tissue around our blind spots. Religion, of course, is irrational. Not long ago I was speaking with a

Jahovah's Witness who sought to prove to me through deductive argument that God gives each of us a choice. "What about babies and retarded people?" I wanted to know.

"We don't understand God," she replied. "We cannot question God."

This statement is irrefutable. Had it been her sole line of attack, I would not and could not have counterattacked. Intellectual argument is itself a form of testing and challenging, like scarring a drop of putative gold with acid to determine whether it is real. We cannot question God, for example, because our knowledge and belief is weak, hence easily damaged or destroyed by the acid test; or else because we are so firm in our faith that we have no need for proof, but any attempt at proof would in fact be injurious and insulting. This is one reason why I think that gospel singing or voodoo rituals or Cajun faith healing or whatever can be such a help and comfort, particularly to poor people. There is no seam in it. If you believe, you believe. Nobody can pry it away.

One afternoon I told Madame Yvette that I was going to sleep in a homeless encampment under the freeway that night, and she said: Why go there, William? You not afraid?"

"What about you?" said the taxi driver. "Your power don't protect you?" (This was exactly the question that I had wanted to ask.)

"If I sleep with them maybe I lose my power," replied Yvette. "Spirits, they are always clean, clean, clean. That's why in my *oun'phor* [voodoo tambo] in Haiti, always take off the shoes. If I sleep in a dirty place with all those little animals [lice], maybe the spirit desert me."

In short, she did not care to put her presumed invulnerability to the test.

Ed, on the other hand, simply made his religion reflect his vulnerability. He was always saying: "Don't be surprised if you see that door to Saint Luke's church blow off and a 20-foot devil come right out of it. 'Cause they're demonized. 'Cause they don't help the homeless, an' they believe in the Trinity, an' they try to use Job 1 on you." He sighed and said: "We always in a struggle for good and evil in this city."

I wondered if either side would ever win. And I thought of something Molra had once written: "I do not choose to be limited to the power of any human person I've met, including myself. This work would not be possible using any human 'power.'" ■

RAVE

(continued from page 187)

largest dance clubs. Campion, a wiry 25-year-old with big, perpetualy spooked brown eyes, is enthusiastically about the music, but—and here he echoes virtually every British rave aficionado we came into contact with—he feels rave is all but spent as a social force in England. He doesn't go out to events very much anymore, preferring to hole up at home with his headphones. The last time he set foot in Megetropolis, it was years ago when the crowds were smallish and ultrahip.

Tonight the club is packed, and there's a decided "bridge and tunnel" non-lock to most of the assembled. The dance floors are packed, but the energy is weird. Across one of the rooms is a bar with a thick fringe of thirsty people. Maybe that's the problem. In the States—and this was apparently the case during the early, heady days of English rave—alcohol is considered anathema to the transcendent nature of the rave experience. But now, with the government hot on rave's tail, and the move to safer quarters indoors... well, pollution was probably inevitable.

Our hopes for English rave are raised later in the week, when, scouring *Times Out*, London's popular weekly entertainment magazine, we notice an ad for something called Mege-dog. Mege-dog turns out to be a real mindblower on the order of Narnia and other large state-side events. Set in the sprawling auditorium and courtyard of a disused-looking university complex, it features several different environmentally distinct areas, and a flux of entertainment, from an extraordinary light show to berserk circus acts. This being England, the assembly seems a bit more reserved than we're used to, but there's that same tenebrous, indefinable feeling of mutual comfort and kindly interactions. Joel suddenly merges with the dancing horde, his face so blissed it's almost unrecognizable. Dennis watches Joel from the sidelines, then loses sight, and eventually he's just as high on all the beauty as everyone else.

Part of that beauty has to do with the absence of sexual tension. People are sweaty and shirtless. Bodies are moving in ways that would normally inspire, well, horniness. But nobody's cruising, or not that we can pick up on. Maybe it's the drugs. Unlike alcohol or coke,

pot and ecstasy do something sweet to the brain that seems to outbalance whatever lust incidentally arises: pot induces self-involvement; ecstasy spins its cocoon of well-being. Everyone at Magadog seems kind of spaced and contentedly alone, despite their proximity. Maybe the asexuality is influenced by techno, which tends to be rather cerebral. Maybe it's a reaction to AIDS. Probably it's all of the above, and more.

Tachno doesn't get any more cerebral than the alacronic music of the Future Sound of London. Their 1994 CD, *Lifeforms*, is so far advanced in every way from the work of even their most adventurous peers that it's impossible to characterize in a word. ("Progressive" maybe?) Is that term safely dissociated from '70s pomp merchants like Yas and ELP?)

One day near the very end of our visit, we make a pilgrimage to FSOL's recording studio/second home in the north London suburbs, hoping to hear a less embittered read on the current state of rave. Gery Cobain, a stylish intellectual, and Brian Doungans, his painfully shy cohort, respond to our inquiries with a shrug and a very slight mist about the eyes. FSOL's plans have nothing to do with dance events. They talk about wanting to transcend every tradition of the pop music world, and build instead an extremely high-tech relationship between their music and whoever wants to listen. When they perform live, it's here in the studio, linked by telephone lines to an international array of radio stations and concert venues. They're in the early stages of starting their own television station, hoping to reformat their increasingly far-flung sound investigations.

FSOL may be idealists in desperate need of a reality check, or they may have just put their collective finger on a practical way to translate rave's extraordinary goals into cultural realities. Time will tell. In the meantime, they make an amazing noise. Just think, continues Cobain, gesturing wildly, the more the government tries to regulate art production, the more sophisticated FSOL's mode of communication will become. Dancing, drugs, record companies, MTV, governments... artists don't need to be tied down by any of them. "Just fucking imagine it," he enthuses. Joel and Dennis share a glance, and our trip sort of flashes before our eyes. Okay, cool. We can. ■



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TOWNSHEND

(continued from page 180)

today, I can't pretend I don't. It would be irresponsible to goof off and pretend I was a shithhead simply because that's what rock'n'roll demands of me: pulling on a leather jacket, putting a ring through my nose, and fucking off at Club USA with some goofy blond. It would be wrong and I'm not going to do it. For me now, as an artist, it's important that I actually live a good life."

Do you mean a morally good life? "Yeah, as much as I'm capable, a decent life. I read in an interview recently where somebody asked Roger [Daltrey] what he thought of my years as a follower of Meher Baba. He laughed and said, 'I judge people by what they do, not what they say.' Ironically, I had spent a long time feeling very uncomfortable with the way Roger behaved. I somewhat envied his libertarian way of living, his open marriage, his joy in his self, and his physicality. I wanted what he had but I couldn't do it his way. When I wrote *Tommy*, I was much closer to accepting who I really was: Pete Townshend the wacko, spiritual nerd. That's much closer to who I am than Pete Townshend, the guy who smashes guitars or who quipped up his hair and fucked 16 blondes in New York in three days in 1978, consumed 85 grams of cocaine, vomited into a bucket, and was hauled off after a drug overdose. The one thing I don't want to be judged by is my fucking actions. Because all of my actions have been the actions of somebody else."

So he may not be inclined to pulverize perfectly good guitars anymore, but the Townshendian rage still boils; what's changed is the target. In the Who's heyday, what was loosely termed "the Establishment" was not so much a particular group of people as it was the forces that conspire to "put us down," as he famously phrased it. Now that he is no longer the flailing, windmilling proto-punk, but "a plain man tied up in life," it is for the more fundamental human qualities—compassion, forgiveness—that he campaigns. Now the very people who elevated him to fame stand accused of boxing him in.

Referring to "Don't Try to Make Me Real," a song on *Psychodrella*, he explains, "What I wanted to say really specifically was: 'Get the fuck out of my face and let me be who I am.'"

"To whom?" I ask.

"I don't know," shrugs Townshend. "To everybody, to the world, I suppose. In other words, don't fucking tell me I'm an alcoholic. I'll decide. Don't tell me I'm a pop star. I'll decide. Don't tell me that because I'm a liar. Don't tell me that because I'm a rock star I can't have values, or that because I'm nearly 50 years old I can't do this or that. I'm in fucking charge. Nobody is ever going to fuck with me again."

Townshend remains passionate about both his convictions and his confusions. In an age where anti-idealism signifies authenticity, Townshend's approach remains downright subversive. Perhaps most antithetical in this cynical age is his conviction that rock is bigger than the sum of its parts, that it serves a higher purpose.

"Back with the Who, I suffered from trying to carry the utopian mantle of rock'n'roll. I believe in its power to change the way we think. It has changed me. I think it has made me a better person than when I was a snotty little shit of 19 who just wanted to get stoned and laid, make loads of money, while pretending all the time to be a good person."

"One of the things that goes on in rock," Townshend continues, "is a deep and fundamental sharing of an absolute and awful alienation that occurs when you and your family split. So you look to your peers and find that friends are complicated, love affairs are impossible, marriages are a disaster, and having children is—you know, you're on your fucking own. That's the thing rock'n'roll constantly shrugs off, but which I refuse to. I can't shrug it off because that's what our fans brought to us. It was like, for fuck's sake, give us a fucking family."

Townshend's present-day "family" extends beyond his traditional Bio-Rickers to a new breed of alt-rock misfit, Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder, who sang in Roger Daltrey's 1994 tribute to Townshend at Carnegie Hall, is a huge fan, as is Guided By Voices' Robert Pollard, who is rumored to listen to *Quadrophonia* daily while trying to write a concept album of his own in homage. Townshend has become something of a sage, called upon by the younger generation of reluctant rock heroes to impart some words of wisdom.

"When I met Eddie Vedder," recalls Townshend, "we talked for about an hour and I got an insight into what was going on there. He felt in a slightly less acute way what

Kurt Cobain was feeling about Nirvana, i.e., that Pearl Jam became a big rock band overnight, able to fill stadiums and sell millions of records, just like the Who and other bands of our generation. But they'd seen how those bands had eventually capitulated under the sheer pressure of corporate career management.

"Before Kurt Cobain died, I remember feeling an acute sense of fear about what was going to happen to him; the same way I felt about Jimi Hendrix and Keith Moon. It's easy to say now, but I knew something huge was going to happen. I didn't know whether he and his old lady were going to become the new John and Yoko, or whether they were going to self-destruct, but I somehow felt they were important.

"It's hard when you're immortalized for running out of breath. Not for dying or for exploding, but simply for fizzling out. Roger and a lot of other people around the band are absolutely needed that the Who fizzled out rather than ending with a great album or tour. I accept that, because I know where the fizzle came from: not from a lack of direction, but from a lack of fuel. We knew where we wanted to go, we just didn't have the tools or the machinery to get there. I think Kurt blew his brains out because he was trying to go to that exalted, stellar place where the Beatles produced 'Strawberry Fields' or where the Beach Boys produced 'God Only Knows.' What other option did he have? He knew the only other option was to fizzle."

Townshend once described his legendary guitar windmill as an attempt to flail his way closer to God. Known to ask private airplane pilots to take off vertically, he swings high and falls hard in his spiritual quests.

"As a boy, I was in church every fucking Sunday for eight years and it never reached me; never touched me. But rock'n'roll provided an answer. One of the things that convinces me that a higher power exists is simply what happens in performances. It operates through individuals. Therefore the individual artist is aware of a higher power that can reflect and express the feelings of anybody in the audience who also believes in a higher power. When you know God and know you're on the right pathway you get a biological fucking signal that you're on the right path. You don't

need to be told by some priest. You know what is good and you know what is bad. Good is what accelerates you on your spiritual journey and bad is what holds you back. It's as simple as that."

In the political heat of the '60s and '70s, attempts were made by radical political groups to appropriate the Who and use their music to propel the revolution. Townshend sent them packing. "This is art," he once told a radio interviewer. "Art doesn't kill people. Art doesn't make revolution. I told them to try to understand what rock'n'roll was before they tried to appropriate."

And yet Townshend was often described as a "socialist" among rock stars. I wondered how he had reconciled his faith in socialism with the disaster it proved to be. "I've had terrible anguish with the collapse of Marxism," he says demurely. "Particularly the discrediting of mainstream Marxism. There was always the hope that it would come right and that would be the big moment for the human race. What I want to do is go and talk to Arthur Miller about it. I want to know how he feels." The casual reference to the legendary playwright provides a clue into another Townshend persona—the man of letters. Since the collapse of the Who, Townshend, who was initially going to become a graphic designer, turned to another passion, book editing, working as an editor at the British publisher Faber and Faber. Townshend's torrential, free-associative style of speaking reflects his long-standing love of language, and it's easy to see why he is so often misquoted. His openness hasn't changed. But one of Townshend's central themes has always been the nature of truth, and he's learned the hard way that writers often play fast and loose with it.

"The first thing you realize when you're approached by a journalist is that you are no longer in the domain of truth. Therefore the most important thing is to lie, actively. So the conclusion drawn by both the journalist and by the public has got to be the wrong conclusion. The correct conclusion remains something you have control over. I've spoken to lots of other people in the music business, and they've all said the same thing. 'Do you lie to interviewers?' You fucking bet. The whole thing is a lie from start to finish."

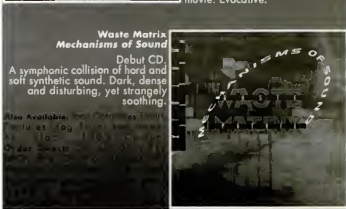
Then Pete Townshend leans back and smiles. ●



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AIDS (continued from page 193)

defects. In the second group of 92 pregnancies, 9 ended in abortion or miscarriage, and there were 83 live births. Of these, 5 birth defects were reported, and ten babies had various illnesses and complications. Some of these complications, such as anemia and neutropenia, are typical of AZT toxicity.

A follow-up study to 076, ACTG 219, was set up to trace the children of 076 and to document any complications they may have. ACTG 288 will track the adverse effects on the women. No data is yet available from either of these studies.

Nokes says, "My main complaint is that we're giving these women way too much AZT, for way too long, and we haven't bothered to find out whether it's necessary." The study did not explore the question of at what point—in utero or at birth—HIV is transmitted.

"I don't think we're going to have the answer to the toxicity questions in a year or two. I think we're talking six, seven, ten years," says Nokes. She worries that this could be the equivalent of DES, a drug given to women in the '60s that caused vaginal and cervical cancers in their daughters 20 years later.

Maline Ricardo has been attending some of the 076 rallies, and has received harsh criticism for speaking out against it. "I was the first woman of color that these people had ever heard be against 076," she says. "They thought it was only white women, that it was a racist thing to be against 076."

While most of the ACTG consent forms said that maternal transmission was 30 percent, at least one from the Los Angeles site overstated flagrantly that up to 50 percent of all babies born to HIV-infected women become infected. In the private ACTG staff memo, by contrast, it says that the rate of mother to infant transmission varies from 7 percent to 40 percent. The Los Angeles site consent form also stated that 60 percent of the HIV-positive babies would die of AIDS within the first year, but a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in February, 1994 found that only 15 to 20 percent of infants born HIV-infected develop AIDS in the first year of life—those born to mothers with very advanced disease.

In his book *Rethinking AIDS*, AIDS researcher Robert Root-Bernstein reports, "Less than a third of HIV-seropositive infants go on to develop AIDS. Other factors tip the scale." Root-Bernstein notes the parallels between "AIDS babies" and babies who inherit immune complications related to their mothers' drug additions. These immune problems are identical in HIV-positive and HIV-negative infants, and in the U.S., 80 percent of all babies with AIDS are born to drug-addicted women.

"You have to put all this in a framework," says Nokes. "People are angry that these women are getting pregnant. So it's like, 'Well, if the mother's going to have this baby, we'll have to intervene to protect it.' That's what the mind-set is, and the intervention is AZT. Yes, AZT is an extreme intervention, but as a society, we'll do whatever we have to do to make sure this

kid doesn't get infected." Rosa Harris is an HIV-positive mother of three who entered the 076 trial during her latest pregnancy and considered it a positive experience. Though the AZT left her tired and sometimes nauseated, she didn't suffer significant side effects and her daughter Distiani seems to be doing fine. Harris was lambasted in January of 1994 on the *Montel Williams Show* for making the decision to have children despite having the "fatal" virus. "I felt persecuted on that show," says Harris, who remains in perfect health. "I mean, none of us know when our time is going to be up."

But the most complex and explosive question underlying this whole mess is the one that is hardly ever mentioned, namely: whether HIV in fact is the cause of AIDS. Some scientists insist that it is not, like Dr. Peter Duesberg at University of California at Berkeley, a molecular biologist who has a background in chemistry and cells AZT "AIDS by prescription" for its ability to deplete the immune system by bone marrow toxicity. When Duesberg ordered a few vials of AZT for experimental purposes, it arrived with a scull end crossbones on the bottle, as is normally found on poisons.

"From the very beginning, I found this so absurd and so offensive, even from the viral AIDS hypothesis standpoint," says Duesberg. "To give a mother and a fetus AZT for months, just to reduce the chance of HIV transmission which is the hypothetical cause of AIDS. It's just unbelievable. It's like Herod in the Bible. You kill all the baby boys just to make sure there's no Jesus."

Temper runs high on the subject of ACTG 076. Dr. Janet Mitchell, who works at Harlem Hospital and is a supporter of 076, rejects the notion that minority women are being misled. "These women are not foolish," she says. Many of them always refused to take AZT for themselves, but when it comes down to the maternal instinct, it's a whole different question."

Only time will tell whether the skeptics or the supporters have truth on their side, or whether, as is often the case, some truth resides in both camps. But it is an alarming indictment of contemporary naïveté about pharmaceuticals that we are so ready to give women and babies this toxic drug during such a critical stage of growth.

Says Nokes: "People are saying, 'Oh come on, don't overreact. This isn't DES.' Well, I've been in nursing for 27 years and I'm not so sure. I'm not sure that it's not DES."

Rebecca Denison, an HIV-positive woman who wants to have a child one day, sums up the dilemma millions of women are now facing. "It's really tormenting," says Denison, who is founder and Executive Director of World, a newsletter for HIV-positive women. "I think to myself, if I took AZT and the child was negative, what will the long-term effects be? AZT is a really toxic drug. On the other hand, the results of the study are pretty dramatic. I really don't know what I would choose." •

Certain names and identifying characteristics of people interviewed for this article have been changed.

HIP HOP

(continued from page 148)

access to privilege often leads to another bewildering level of society's no-service signs. Ironically, the above incident recalls "Mr. Officer," a song on *Bizarre Ride*, which spoofed the black nationalist rage of Public Enemy's "Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos" by staging a scenario in which the fellas were pulled over by the cops for having, oh, about 90 parking tickets. The point wasn't to portray racism or police harassment as paranoid fantasies, but to suggest that such issues get lost when a rapper goes off on a rambling ego trip and imagines that he's leading a suicidal prison break. "We're serious," says Romye. "But sometimes we get so serious we start laughing." Feeling just as righteously riled as PE, just as spaced-out and persecuted as Snoop, the Pharcyde's responses, both musical and personal, are blessedly unpredictable. And that's serious progress.

A stunning, early evening sun sinks into the Pacific as casually chic white and black couples file into the Long Beach Museum of Art, a tasteful brick mansion with a grassy sculpture garden overlooking the beach. Most of the white couples, donors and sponsors of the museum's concert series, sit outside at tables sipping wine and San Pellegrino water. Black couples spread blankets on the ground, some opening picnic baskets. A jazz combo warms up the crowd with a Kenny G theng. After a lengthy wait, three 50s-ish men move onstage, dressed in a mix of African Kente garb and fatherly slicks. Hands gesturing, bodies swerving, they stop stock-still in unison. Their raps overlap with the precision of a veteran repertory company. "Then God made men!" says one, drawing out the last word, echoed by the others. Finishing with mischievous smiles, they counsel, "These recial things do take time. So throw another log on the fire." Then the three quietly hiss, "Ssssss."

The Watts Prophets—Amde Hamilton, Otis O'Solomon, and Richard Dedeaux—are the legitimate godfathers of L.A. hip hop and, along with the Last Poets, have deeply influenced hip hop. The Prophets' 1971(!) album *Rappin' Black in a White World* has been sampled by mainly gangsta/hustler types (N.W.A., Too Short, DJ Quik) for an instant political edge, but the group is more relevant as a model for any rappers operating outside received notions of hip hop's sound and identity. While some of today's most thoughtful artists—the Pharcyde, De La Soul, Freestyle's Mikah-Nine and Aceyalone, A Tribe Called Quest, Queen Latifah, Pete Rock & C.L. Smooth, Common Sense, the Coup, Basehead, or Ice Cube and Chuck D in their least indulgent moments—repeatedly ask the question "Who am I?" the Watts Prophets skip ahead and wonder, "What is a man?"

"If you come from a social background that's sometimes painful and oppressive, when you first start writing, you have to throw up, in a manner of speaking," says the Prophets' Hamilton, sitting in the living room of his modest family home on a neatly maintained residential block of South

Central. "Just like the young rapper today, he has to regurgitate all of this 'I' and 'Me.' He's telling you, 'This is happening to me right now,' and that's important for a kid who nobody's ever really listened to. But after you get out of your system, you see more clearly and realize that it's bigger than you."

The Prophets have every reason to be bitter—an early publicist turned out to be an FBI informant against the Panthers and other black radicals, the Watts Writer's Workshop, where the group formed after the Watts Riots in 1965, was burned to the ground (also presumably by the FBI), and despite their stature, they've only released one album (a second is finally on the way). But the group has remained defiantly optimistic, producing an Emmy-nominated TV documentary and working with various arts programs as teachers and advisers. "We need to know more about each other, instead of blaming each other for things we had nothing to do with," says Hamilton. "You notice when we finished that show [at the Museum], we didn't run to the dressing room, we ran to the audience. I don't know if that helps us or it's gonna get us killed one day, but that's what we do."

This effort to talk with an audience as individuals is rare in commercial hip hop, where most rappers talk of an imagined, ghetto-centric demographic in marketable clichés. Rappers who stray from the formula, like those from the Good life scene, are usually tagged "alternative," a label that means immediate sales in rock, but in hip hop has become a useless catchall for groups who play "real" instruments, feature female members (Arrested Development, Digable Planets, the Fugees), nod overtly to jazz, and don't act like meanies. With record companies clamoring for familiar, usually negative, images, artists themselves come to believe that such imaginative hip hop does not properly represent the community, or that it perversely abandons a built-in pop opportunity. The worst thing that's happened in hip-hop music in a long time are the terms "be real" and "represent," says James "Ed Lover" Roberts, co-host of *Yo! MTV Raps*, the show that unwittingly ushered in the gangsta rap era. "What people don't understand is that being real is being whatever you are in your heart. You are not being real just because you say you tote gats and smoke blunts on funk tracks.... This harder-than-thou attitude is hurting the music."

Being sucked into the vacuum of "alternative rap" has baffled no group more than the Roots. A remarkable hip-hop band formed at the Philadelphia First School for Creative and Performing Arts, and the first East Coast group to extend the Good life aesthetic, their debut *Do You Want More!!!!!!!* wasn't marketed directly to the hip hop audience. There's already talk of securing Weezer star Spike Jonze to direct a video. "When the album first came out, we were panicking, but everyone at the label [Geffen] was like, 'Oh, c'mon now, you guys aren't the normal rap group, what are you complaining about?'" says Amir "B.R.O.tha.R." Thompson, the group's drummer. "I mean, we're very normal, down-to-earth people, and we love and respect hip hop. So I have no idea what's supposed to be so weird about us."



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Neither do Mikah Nine and Aceyalone. Mikah, who studied music theory after Freestyle Fellowship broke up, is now living in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn and recording a solo album for Capitol; Aceyalone, who has independently released two albums of material—*To Whom It May Concern* and *Project Blowed*, featuring Freestyle family members Ganjah K and the female rappers SIN—is also working on a Capitol LP. Both are visionary hip hop voices who feel that they've put in their time as underground martyrs. "It's been frustrating," says Mikah. "We've always put so much into the art and not enough into business protocol. On top of that, we were on some old postmodern hip-hop shit that people are only appreciating now."

Perhaps hip hop's future simply

hinges on acknowledging the work of these "alternative" innovators, and then finding room for them to survive in the pop marketplace. "To a certain degree, everyone wants to be a Snoop or a Biggie (Notorious B.I.G.), a household name," says Mikah. "But I've hit it with the Last Poets, the Watts Prophets, different griots, people in different languages, all the freestyling heads in the parks all over the country. The only thing I haven't done is make a lot of money....Look, I grew up in hip hop, trying to put it on the map as a conscious movement. I put in that foundation. But right now, I feel like I'm only recognized as a marsupial in the mammalian family, like a platypus and shit." He laughs and strums his fingers across a keyboard. "The move now is to get paid, keep my art alive, and not have to die to be appreciated." ■

EQUALITY NOW

In the fall of 1993, a 13-year-old girl named Sapanhar was raped in Dharmas, Bangladesh. The village *salish*, or council of elders, exonerated the alleged rapist because four adult male Muslims did not witness the crime, as required for prosecution under Islamic law. Sapanhar became pregnant, which the elders took as evidence of illicit sexual intercourse. She was pronounced guilty and sentenced to be publicly flogged 101 times, 40 days after giving birth in June, 1994. Following protest by the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, a women's group which gave Sapanhar safe haven, the Inspector General of Police was ordered to undertake an investigation.

Over the past several years in Bangladesh, village *salish* have sentenced people to public flogging or even death by stoning, although they have no legal authority to do so. The *salish* are led by local clerics who apply Islamic law in violation of the Bangladesh penal code. Defendants before *salish* have almost always been women who do not conform to socially accepted behavior patterns. The government has taken little action to stop the abuse.

Please write to Mirza Gholam Hafiz, Minister of Law and Justice, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Express concern that the Government of Bangladesh has not taken adequate measures to safeguard the rights of women and girls such as Sapanhar who have been targeted by village *salish*. Demand that Sapanhar's case be investigated swiftly and that appropriate action be taken to demonstrate that violence against women will not be tolerated in Bangladesh.

Send copies of your letters to Equality Now, P.O. Box 20646, Columbus Circle Station, New York, NY 10023.

EQUALITY NOW WORKS FOR THE CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD.

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PUSSY GALORE

(continued from page 153)

And whatever's left, they can just lick off her face.

But aside from Sprinkle's comment, it's hard to find much dissent. Few women involved in feminist pornography are willing to openly challenge each other's work. Dismissive critiques were given to me, but always with the famous disclaimer, "Don't quote me on that."

Beth Jaker of the Feminist Anti-Censorship Task Force ironically endorses this lack of frank commentary. "I think one should be as critical as one chooses," she tells me, "but not in a way that harms another artist."

It's a funny contradiction—this last vestige of feminine politeness within this very radical movement. It's okay to be whipped and hung naked from the ceiling, but you shouldn't say anything mean about anybody.

The danger is, without debate, we may end up with the emperor's new eroticism, wherein nobody is ever allowed to announce, "There's nothing political about that film! Everybody's just naked!" And feminists who make pornography to inspire debate may find they are simply banging down open doors.

It's even harder to find discussion in the mainstream women's movement. The National Organization for Women gives me this statement: "There are different views on pornography within the women's movement, and there is no consensus. Therefore, NOW doesn't have a position on feminist pornography at this time, and won't have one soon."

Anti-porn superhero Catherine MacKinnon didn't return my phone call. "There is no such thing as discourse with MacKinnon," writer Sallie Tisdale tells me. "She will not debate. She only speaks when she's got the podium to herself."

"Catherine won't even face me off in public anymore," Candida Royale says.

"Women in the anti-porn movement have been in a fog for ten years," director Fanny Fatale says. "Forget it. You can't talk to them at all."

Sprinkle is more conciliatory. "I have respect for women who fight pornography, because they have a lot to teach us about feminism. But their work is to teach about violence and rape and abuse. My work is to teach about pleasure and ecstasy and joy. We should be learning from each other."

After three weeks, a spokesper-

son for the organization Women Against Pornography finally returns my calls. She will not grant me an interview, she says, because I "work for a pornographer."

I try to explain that she has mistaken SPIN publisher Bob Guccione, Jr., for his father, *Penthouse* publisher Bob Guccione, Sr. Her reply can be loosely translated as "La-lala-lala! I'm not listening."

That is an unfortunate mistake. As an individual, she certainly has the right not to talk about pornography. But as the spokesperson for her national organization, she should prepare a few sentences on the subject for curious journalists. Sadly, this puritanical silence insures that the movement's veiled arguments will not be heard at all.

The fact is, if you only talk to people who already agree with you, you are not a political organization. You're a support group.

In the meantime, work goes on.

Maria Beatty is shooting the climax of *The Black Glove*. She's naked in her bathtub. Goddess Rosemary is standing over her, straddling the tub's edges, about to pee haughtily on her director and slave. But then she slips, and one of her gold shoes falls into the toilet with a loud, undignified splash. I take a picture. Beatty dies laughing. She's rolling in the bathtub, tears ruining her eyeliner, completely out of character, pointing at Rosemary and giggling her guts out.

Rosemary doesn't think it's funny. Beatty eventually regains control and wipes her eyes. She gets that submissive look back on her face, and signals the cameraman to shoot. Then Rosemary pees on her. Then Beatty pees on herself.

"Oh, mistress!" she moans, obedient and defeated.

Beatty calls to cut, end, still in the bathtub, borrows the camera to take one last shot of Rosemary, straddled above her. She looks through the viewfinder, then snaps fiercely to the cameraman, "I certainly hope you didn't use this autofocus the whole time. It looks like shit!"

He grovels, apologizes, and is dismissed.

Beatty and Rosemary invite me to watch the final tapes with them, but I decline. I leave them in front of the monitor, together.

"Beautiful," Beatty says, seeing herself bound to the chair. "Perfect."

Rosemary smiles at what they have just added to the long history of pornography.

"Bring it on," she says. ■

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Letter From Dayton, Ohio, Bureau

by Jim Greer

HERE IS WHAT I REMEMBER: Sitting in a bar a few years back—after work, I'm pretty sure—with sweet Daniel Fidler, our late research editor. He was pumping me in that unbearably earnest way of his for general interviewing tips. I had none. "You have to understand, Daniel, I don't know what I'm doing. None of us do. That's why we're here. Now, buy me another margarita."

"Here" meaning SPIN. Well, first of all, before I forget, congratulations, Boss. Ten years is almost as old as my car. I was lying, sort of, to Daniel, in that kind of teasing manner I always assumed with him, for which alone I deserve to bask in hell. Some of us do know what we're doing, but that's not the thing that makes this magazine rock, when it does, at least not in my view. I don't, though. I don't know what I'm doing. I do have a few rules, but this is stuff everybody knows: (1) It's cold pills first, then wine; (2) Don't talk to strangers; (3) Fly Delta.

And I don't think you know what you're doing,

either, and I mean that in the best possible way. Let me explain. Self-assurance = complacency = arrogance = every other stupid music magazine on the newstands today. What we had five years ago when I joined SPIN was a kind of naïveté about what we were supposed to be doing—well, yeah, it's a music magazine, but what kind of music magazine? I dunno—that got us in trouble at least as much as it got us respect. Probably more. We got laughed at a lot. I got laughed at. I don't like being laughed at when I'm not trying to be funny. But it's exactly that naïveté, that wide-eyed wonder with which we still approach the world of rock and its attendant cultures and subcultures, that made and makes SPIN special. That we somehow managed to keep it intact through the course of the past ten years is pretty cool. That we've managed that, and flourished, means maybe that Gen X or whatever we're calling it this week isn't as jaded and confused as it's been pegged.


We've always worked on instinct here. No rules, not really. The result: Too many John Mellencamp covers, sure, but also a Nick Cave cover when no one would have been stupid enough (still our lowest selling issue ever, right?), a Nirvana cover before anyone else would even have considered it, and more than a few late-night editorial battles over the famous Billy Idol vs. Sonic Youth cover dilemma (you eventually plumped for Billy, a sound commercial choice. Chicken). These are for-instance, of course. These are illustrations. I have more.

From time to time, SPIN gets one of those angry letters accusing us of pimping corporate rock to the masses. I know you're supposed to develop a thick skin about suchlike calumny, but you know what I think? I think our magazine is more independent, both in terms of corporate structure (i.e., where our money comes from) and mindset (i.e., nobody but us decides who we cover or how we cover them) than most so-called

independent record labels, for instance, especially these days. One thing I've always liked about writing for SPIN is that my opinion, as ignorant or badly expressed or just plain ridiculous as it may be, has never in any way been compromised by influence from our advertisers or from the record companies who occasionally pay the airfare for me to go savage one of their poor unsuspecting rock bands. (And certainly not by the puny amount of money I'm paid for publishing those opinions in your magazine, you big cheapskate.) I've never been asked to tone anything down unless it was either (A) patently libelous or (B) so ineffably stupid that no one could understand what I was trying to say.

Okay, enough self-congratulatory wank. Now, a warning: In the next ten years, as we become, you know, fat and sleek and prosperous (I mean, fatter and sleeker and more prosperous), please never forget that we are, basically, clueless. It is our saving grace. Should we ever become possessed of the absurdly self-important idea that we know the first thing about how to put out a rock magazine, I will have to come back to New York and beat some sense out of you. Bubba. ●





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Saturday, Sunday, Saturday, Sunday,
Saturday, Sunday, Holiday.

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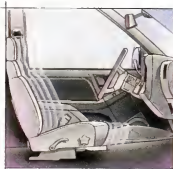
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